

Trains withdrawn in wake of crash

100mph limit introduced as German investigators focus on theory that carriage was partly derailed three miles before disaster struck

Ian Traynor in Bonn and Denis Staunton in Eschede

GERMAN rail officials last night announced they were taking the first-generation of their high-speed InterCity Express (ICE) trains out of service for inspection in the wake of Wednesday's train crash in the northern town of Eschede.

The move came as the transport ministry raised the possibility that a broken wheel on a carriage may have been behind the disaster. "It can't be ruled out that the rupture of a wheel on the first carriage played a role in the derailment," said a spokesman.

Crash investigators were scrutinising a stretch of track three miles from the disaster site for further clues as to what triggered the worst train crash in German history. As days flew at half-mast and the country mourned the scores killed and maimed, theories centred on a faulty piece of track causing a carriage to partly derail. It could then have been carried along before coming right off the

track three miles later at a switching point by the flyover which was brought crashing down on to the train. Two carriages remained under the huge concrete slabs last night. The remains of the bridge were proving difficult to move, even with the help of heavy moving equipment. No survivors were found yesterday and rescue workers had given up hope of finding anyone still alive. The emergency services confirmed 92 people dead.

A spokesman for Deutsche Bahn, the German railways, also discounted suggestions that two railway employees working on a signal box by the bridge at the time of the accident had caused the crash. The two are missing, presumed dead. "Based on statements from the driver that there were no obstacles on the tracks and the fact that the engine itself was not damaged, we can rule out any causal relationship," said the spokesman, Hans-Jürgen Frohns.

Teams of coroners were rushed to the region to try to help identify the dead, many of whom were badly disfigured. Officials said dental records would need to be examined and that the whole operation could take months. "The recovery of corpses and parts of corpses has been a terrible burden," said Thomas Othoff, a local Red Cross official. "Clergymen and psychologists had to help us."

Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited the scene to offer his sympathy to the victims and their families, as did his Social Democrat rival in September's federal election, Gerhard Schröder. Mr Schröder, who is the prime minister of Lower Saxony, where Eschede is situated, said that the catastrophe had united Germany in grief for the victims and in gratitude for the efforts of the emergency services. He added that Germans felt closer to one another than they had for many years.

Another theory advanced to explain the crash involved a possible fault in the 1,300ft train's rear locomotive which may have caused the train to break up. "We have to establish the precise point at which the derailment was triggered," said Jörn Pachl, a transport expert at the Technical University of Braunschweig. "But we've simply got no experience of a derailment at this speed." The train had been travelling at 125mph. The theory that one partly-derailed carriage was dragged along by the rest of the train

The World at sixes and sevens

Review

Anne Karpf

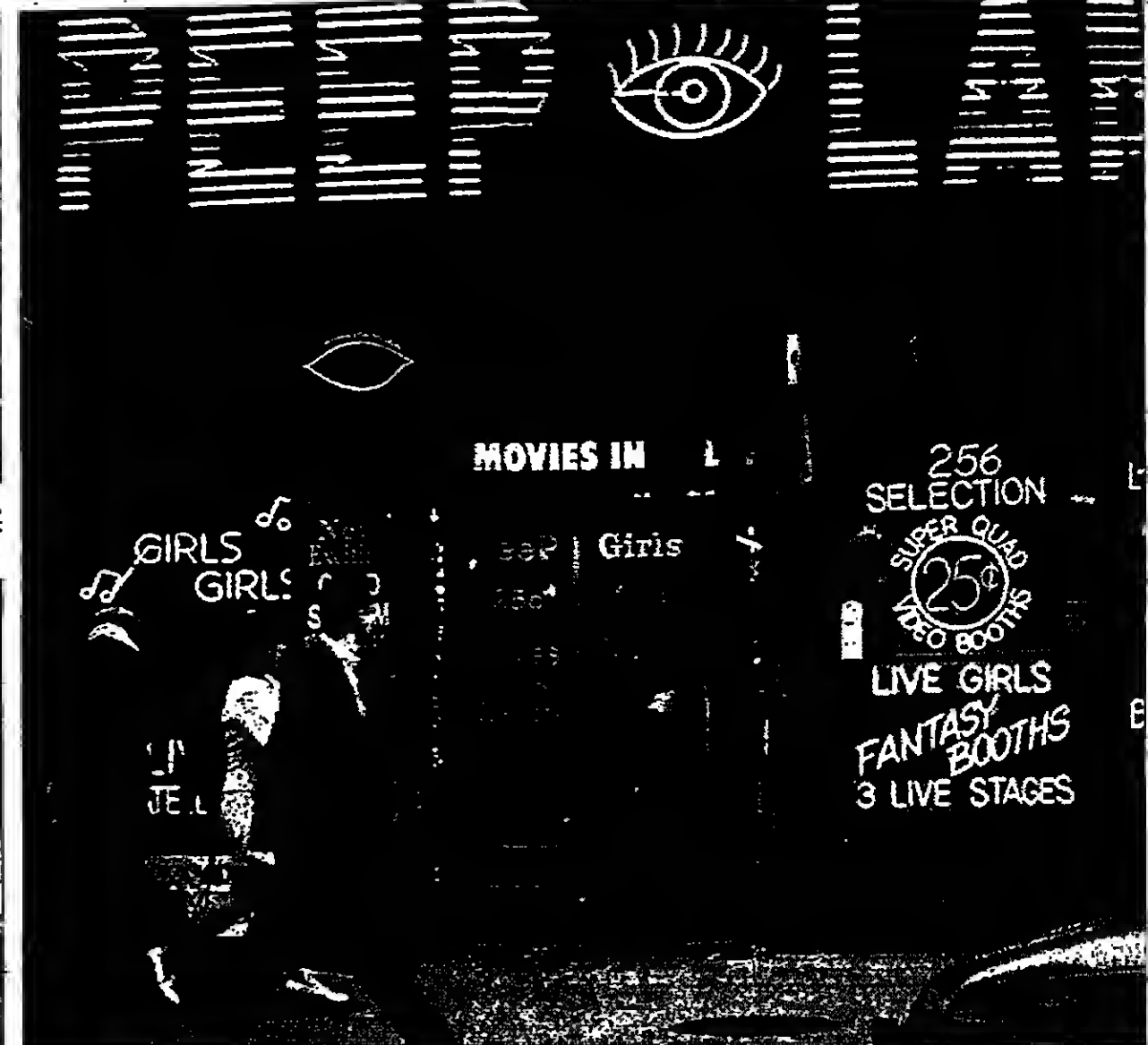
THOSE who can only rise to the soothingly combative tones of John Humphrys and James Naughtie felt deeply dislocated. For when they turned on Today yesterday, there was only the terminally bland voice of Petroc Trelawny presenting On Air.

On Radio 4 at lunchtime, the World wasn't At One but at sixes and sevens, relaying instead part of an old Radio 3 Lunchtime Concert, though BBC management must have counted it a success that they didn't have to fall back on John Birt reading the news, but certainly BBC staff succeeded in alerting people to their grievances, even if the early, truncated news bulletins included only perfunctory reports about the strike. By the afternoon, the bulletins had begun to mention some of the reasons behind it.

From sleazy to squeaky clean



Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has tackled rude taxi drivers, above, and sex shops, right, but many New Yorkers want him to keep his hands off their hot dog vendors, below



BBC strike threat to World Cup

continued from page one

England's first Test against South Africa at Edgbaston. Radio 4's flagship Today programme was cancelled and replaced with classical music from Radio 3. Short news bulletins appeared on the hour, while the World at One was cut to 15 minutes.

Shiny Big Apple sheds rotten-to-the-core image

Sex shops banned but mayor's crusade to clean up New York puts street atmosphere at risk

Mark Tran in New York

MAYOR Rudolph Giuliani yesterday celebrated another victory in his crusade to clean up New York after a federal appeals court upheld a decision to banish porn shops and strip bars to more remote city areas.

But his latest triumph was tempered by the first serious rumblings among New Yorkers that their autocratic mayor has gone too far in his determination to improve New York's quality of life.

The New York Times yesterday chastised Mr Giuliani for taking on street vendors, which, along with sex shops, are his latest target after rude taxi drivers, squeegee merchants, beggars and jaywalkers. In its lead editorial the paper declared: "In his zeal

for order and obedience, he must not destroy the lively street scene that is part of the city's historic flavour. No one misses the squeegee men, but do we really want to outlaw the corner hot-dog stand?"

New Yorkers voted for Mr Giuliani largely because of his pledge to improve the city's quality of life. Mr Giuliani lost no time in getting rid of New York's notorious squeegee men, who cleaned car windshields at traffic lights. More significant successes followed, notably a big drop in crime that has made New York one of America's safest large cities and a case study on how to fight

crime through more active policing. New Yorkers have welcomed the plunge in the crime rate and the cleaner streets but some people are beginning to wonder if the mayor is going over the top. "No one wants to go back to the old days when the place was filthy, but you have to strike a balance. People expect the place to be noisy and rowdy, that's life in the big city, and I think he's crossed a threshold," said one resident.



Pickets greet the BBC's director-general, John Birt

Bee-on-the-bone crisis with 10 billion stings in the tail

Sketch



Simon Hoggart

AGRICULTURE questions with Jack Cunningham yesterday. I arrived just in time to hear Anne Campbell (Lab, Cambridge) ask about "genetically modified

fruits". She said this sounds like the perfect description of the Tory front bench — especially since the reshuffle — I listened with great care, at least up to the point when I fell asleep. Thursdays tend to be dull and poorly attended in the Commons, so my somnolence attracted some attention. When I woke up, round about the time the House was discussing beekeeping, I found a note left at my seat by one of the badge messengers: "Please put me out at Croydon."

Derek Wyatt (Lab, Sittingbourne) rose to point out that farmers in his constituency found that it cost 38p a pound to raise lamb, and that they received only 42p when they sold it at Ashford. Yet the same flesh was being sold in supermarkets for £2.78 a pound. Wasn't it time to regulate supermarkets?

In the past, even Tories would not have dared defend profiteering in the workers' meat. It would be only marginally less disgusting than watering the workers' beer. Yet a great boozing arose from the Chamber at Mr Wyatt's suggestion. Jeff Rooker, a junior agriculture minister, and once a tremendous scourge of crookery and cupidity, stood up and said, in a manner I can only call venomous: "Madam Speaker, the answer to that question is no!"

He said it with as much ferocity as he might if Mr Wyatt had inquired whether he had ever had sex with a ewe lamb. Or to put it another way, an attack on supermarket chains was as outrageous as an assault on the royal family would have been, say, 30 years ago.

Next Doug Toulhig (Lab, Islington) asked about the Cattle Traceability Scheme. One of the curiosities of the various BSE scares has been that cows are now treated like dangerous fugitives. They are supposed to have "animal passports" (do they complain that the picture looks nothing like them?) and now they have to be traced, tracked down to wherever they might be. One imagines some bovine Philip Marlowe on the case. "I woke up feeling like a hunch of matadors were holding their annual convention in my head. Then it came back to what was left of my brain. She'd hidden the cattle prod in her handbag, and whupp!"

"The dame might have underdressed like sheep fighting in a sack, but it wasn't just her calf who was the sucker. And I'd written her off as a stupid cow."

I took a slug of Bull's Blood. It felt good in two of my three stomachs. But it left the big question: how in hell had she got across the cattle grid? Next the House turned to the topic of British bees. They are suffering from something called the Varroa Jacobsoni mite. In the past, beekeepers would have treated this with tar and icing sugar, or so we were told by James Gray (C, N Wilt).

WE HAVE CUSTOMERS ALL OVER THE WORLD

A family of businesses

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sick

Barry Norman

Foster father 'beat girl, 13 to death

Friday June 5 1998

The Guardian Friday June 5 1998

NEWS 3

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my grievances, page 8
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Foster father 'beat girl, 13 to death'

Luke Harding

THE deputy headmaster of a comprehensive school savagely murdered his 13-year-old foster daughter with an 18-inch metal tent peg after a day of frustration and irritation, a court heard yesterday.

Sion Jenkins, aged 40, shattered the skull of Billie-Jo Jenkins with a series of frenzied blows as she painted the patio doors in the garden of their smart Victorian home. He left her lying face-down in a pool of blood, fleeing the scene and driving away with two of his natural daughters who had been waiting yards away outside.

Jenkins was later arrested after forensic scientists discovered 138 invisible spots of blood on his trousers and fleece jacket which he had worn on the day of the murder in February last year. The misting and splatterings of blood could only have been caused by repeated blows using a heavy object, Lewes crown court was told.

"It may well be that the motive for this crime is never known," Richard Camden Pratt QC, prosecuting, said.

He described the scientific evidence that Jenkins struck and murdered the teenager as incontrovertible, adding: "There are no witnesses to the death. Forensic scientists will say that the defendant's clothing was examined and upon it were splatterings of blood."

"When they were tested with DNA tests they turned out to be the blood of Billie-

Jo. The splattering is consistent with the defendant having stood very close to Billie-Jo when she was struck."

At the time of her murder Billie-Jo had been living with her foster father, his wife Lois, a part-time social worker, and their four natural daughters at their home in Hastings, East Sussex, the court was told.

On the bright and sunny Saturday afternoon she was killed, the teenager had been left alone to paint the patio doors. She was murdered in "a few minutes" by Jenkins after he returned from collecting his daughter Lottie, then 10, from a clarinet lesson, together with his eldest daughter Annie, then 12.

Jenkins then drove off again with both girls on the pretext of buying some white spirit. Following the killing, Jenkins's behaviour was curious, Mr Pratt said. He took a circuitous route around the town before returning to the house empty-handed.

"What was to meet them was horrendous," Mr Pratt added. "He and the girls got out of the car and went up the steps." According to the defendant, Lottie went straight into the dining room and immediately shouted "Dad!" and something about Billie-Jo. He followed and, Billie-Jo lying there, "After phoning an ambulance, Jenkins summoned a neighbour, Denise Franklin, who rushed into the house and found the patio doors wide open."

"Billie-Jo was facing towards the garden. Her head was in a pool of blood," Mr Pratt said. "Her right hand was over her face. It was covered with white paint. It was clear Billie-Jo had been terribly injured. Mrs Franklin tended to Billie-Jo very briefly. She felt for a pulse. She felt warm as she would only have been dead for 15 minutes."

When ambulance staff arrived, Jenkins was sitting outside in his MG sports car, a fact Mr Pratt described as



Sion Jenkins, above, who is accused of killing Billie-Jo Jenkins, above right, with an 18-inch metal tent peg



'There are no witnesses to the death. Forensic scientists will say that the defendant's clothing was examined and upon it were splatterings of blood. When they were tested with DNA tests they turned out to be the blood of Billie-Jo. The splattering is consistent with the defendant having stood very close to Billie-Jo when she was struck.'

Richard Camden Pratt QC, prosecuting

curious. In two 999 calls Jenkins deliberately exaggerated the time he had been away collecting Lottie from her clarinet lesson.

"Obviously the longer time he gave, the easier it would be to suggest a complete stranger had walked from off the street and perpetrated the murder with no motive, having arrived with no weapon

and left without stealing anything," Mr Pratt said.

Mrs Jenkins, who had taken their two other daughters Esther, nine, and Maya, seven, was told of the tragedy and returned home. Later that evening, as the family moved out to stay with friends, she offered Jenkins his fleece jacket. But he refused to wear it, despite the

fact the temperature had plunged to almost freezing, the court was told. A post-mortem the following day revealed that the left side of Billie-Jo's skull had been repeatedly smashed by multiple blows.

There were no fingerprints on the murder weapon, which had originally been used to secure an old garden swing.

Mr Pratt said. But forensic tests showed microscopic spots of blood almost like an aerosol on the defendant's clothing, the court was told. "That misting was also found on Billie-Jo's jumper and leggings," Mr Pratt added. "The sort of specks we are talking about are not visible to the human eye."

Security camera evidence taken earlier in the day showed Jenkins wearing the fleece jacket on the day of the murder during a frustrating visit to Safeways, when he was forced to drive to the store twice after his wife forgot her cheque book.

Jenkins, who had been Billie-Jo's foster father since the summer of 1992, denies murder. The trial continues.

Barry Norman quits BBC for Sky

Stuart Miller and Kamal Ahmed

BARRY Norman is leaving the BBC to join Sky, ending a 26-year relationship which has seen him become the country's most famous film critic.

Mr Norman, who will earn just under £350,000 a year at Sky for presenting a film review programme, is said to have become increasingly frustrated with the BBC for putting his series, Film 98, in a late night "graveyard slot" and regularly changing its transmission time.

He had agreed that Film 99 would be his last series, but he will now join Sky in September after the end of the 25th run of the programme which he has written and presented since joining the BBC in 1972.

"I will look back on my time at the BBC with huge affection," he said yesterday. "But the opportunities offered by Sky proved too attractive to turn down."

Hiring Mr Norman, a former Guardian columnist, is a major coup for Sky which is launching Sky Movies

Exclusives, a new strand of British premieres of films yet to be seen in the cinema.

It recently announced a move into original film production, including an initial three picture development deal with World Production, makers of the hit BBC series This Life.

Sky also has first rights to the American hit series Friends, ER and Seinfeld. Managers hope that the new image will encourage the middle classes, notoriously difficult to encourage into the satellite market, to take Sky.

"I'm as enthusiastic as they are about the idea of channels dedicated to the movies and everything that's going on in the movie industry," Mr Norman said.

Elizabeth Murdoch, general manager of broadcasting at Sky, and Rupert Murdoch's daughter, said she had been courting Mr Norman for some time.

"We are focusing on quality and accessibility and Barry Norman is just the latest in a sequence demonstrating that commitment," she said. "He is the face and the voice of film in the UK,

He gets the stars fighting mad - or snoring



Barry Norman: movies are strictly work

Richard Burton once fell asleep in the middle of the first question of an interview. "He was extremely tired and emotional, so we crept out and left him," said Norman.

He was physically attacked by John Wayne after laughing at the star's suggestion that the US could threaten to bomb Moscow.

He once turned down an invitation to play poker with Brigitte Bardot because he had a deadline to meet.

He is the son of the film producer and director Leslie Norman, whose credits include The Cruel Sea and Summer of the 17th Doll.

Norman describes Arnold Schwarzenegger as "one of the most self-satisfied people I have ever met in my life".

In 1982 he moved briefly to present Omnibus but returned to film reviews after being panned for his lightweight style - a criticism he still faces.

In 1994, he dismissed a low-budget thriller White Angel as "a failure" even though his daughter, Samantha, had a small part in it.

He estimates he has seen approximately 10,000 films in his life and refuses to take his wife, Diana, to the cinema for fun.

and is held in the highest esteem both within the industry and by film fans everywhere.

As well as the review programme, Mr Norman will work on other projects, including specials on particular directors or film seasons.

BBC insiders said that the search for a replacement to Mr Norman had already begun. Mark Lamsar and Mark Cousins, who presents the BBC2 series Moviedrome, have already been suggested to take Mr Norman's place.

"Barry has made an enormous contribution to BBC1 and to the film industry for over 26 years," said Peter Salmon, controller of

BBC1. "To millions of viewers, Barry has personified film for nearly three decades and we are naturally sorry to see him go."

But he added: "The BBC, however, has always had strong links with the cinema and that will continue. It is now important for us to find popular TV's new face of film."

Crackdown urged on medical research fraud

Sarah Boseley Health Correspondent

FRAUD, plagiarism and unethical behaviour among researchers trying to get their names published in prestigious journals is such a problem that a national body is needed to crack down on the perpetrators, two editors said yesterday.

During its first year, their self-help group, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), heard of 27 dubious studies sent by doctors to medical journals and discussed what to do about 22 of them. "It is the tip of the iceberg," said Richard Smith, editor of the British Medical Journal (BMJ). "They probably came from 10 editors, but there are 20,000 biomedical journals."

Speaking at the launch of the committee's first report, Mr Smith and Michael Farthing, professor of gastroenterology at St Bartholomew's/London School of Medicine and Dentistry, who is editor of Gut, said a national body was needed.

It should have "quite big, quite sharp teeth," said Professor Farthing. "It should have the power to investigate, which we don't have. The only way is for a hit squad to go in and say, 'I want to see this now'."

Today's BMJ makes the point by retracting a paper it published in 1993 about the support of people with severe disability. One of the authors, Mark Williams, formerly a senior registrar working in public health in Somerset, has been struck off by the General Medical Council for research fraud.

His co-author, Cameron Bowie, emeritus director of public health in Somerset, says in the BMJ that he asked for the retraction because he looked again at their research after the GMC verdict (which concerned a separate study) and found he could not prove Mr Williams did what he said he had done.

He was supposed to have interviewed and physically assessed 181 severely disabled adults in 1989 and then contacted them a year later to see if their needs had been met. None of the adults whom Mr

Bowie could track down remembered the follow-up interview and only a third could recall the original visit.

The COPE report tells of a paper sent to the BMJ about the use of a non-licensed drug. By sheer chance, the scientist to whom the paper was sent for peer review knew that this group of researchers had not been supplied with that drug since 1992/3, which the manufacturer confirmed.

Mr Smith received a paper from a GP who took 33 patients with high cholesterol levels off their usual medication and substituted drugs he thought would work as well.

There was no evidence that they had given consent. "Indeed, I don't see how he could possibly have got consent for such a study," wrote Mr Smith in the committee's report. "The patients clearly agreed to take the tablets, but I worry that they were misled over the scientific value of the study."

After some agonising, he reported him to the General Medical Council, only to discover that he had already been struck off.

sick@sight.football

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Woman who heard serial killer confess sues police for damages

West horror tales 'induced trauma'

Duncan Campbell
Crime Correspondent

THE woman who listened to the confessions of the serial killer Fred West sought compensation from the police yesterday in the Court of Appeal for the effect the experience has had on her life.

She claimed that she had suffered post-traumatic stress disorder after being appointed as the "appropriate adult" to sit in on police interviews with West after his arrest.

Janet Leach, aged 42, of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, claimed at the Appeal Court in London that she had experienced psychological injury. Her original claim for compensation was turned down last year at Bristol county court.

Her counsel, Roderick Denyer QC, said she had attended around 40 interviews over many months and had heard "the most harrowing and horrifying details" from West.

West, who later hanged himself in jail while awaiting trial on 12 counts of murder, was jailed for life for 10 murders of young women and girls.

Mrs Leach was a volunteer as an appropriate adult — a person called in when young or vulnerable people are interviewed by police. When after 5 time she was replaced, West refused to continue to talk and she was reinstated.



Janet Leach (left) attended around 40 police interviews and heard 'the most harrowing and horrifying details' from Fred West

Mrs Leach, now studying to be a social worker, suffered a stroke when she gave evidence at Mrs West's trial at Winchester crown court in 1996. For a time she was unable to speak.

Last November Bristol county court struck out her compensation claim after ruling that the police did not owe her a duty of care.

Mr Denyer told Lord Justice Henry, sitting with Lord Justice Pill and Lord Justice Brooke, that Mrs Leach had worked for a voluntary organisation with the homeless and had only a little experience as an appropriate adult, for mentally disordered

juveniles. In February 1994 she went to Gloucester police station at the request of the police and met West.

"She attended a significant number of interviews in February and early March," said Mr Denyer. "The police, according to them, indicated that perhaps she should give it up. What happened, the defence itself admits, was that once she went, Fred refused to talk. He was only prepared to start talking again if she came back."

"They [the police] know what she has had to listen to; they know there could be a risk of psychiatric harm. They offered counselling to

their own officers and didn't offer it to her."

He said there was evidence that the police had created "an incredibly close relationship" with Mrs Leach, which now entitled her to sue for damages.

She had been asked to sign a confidentiality agreement which required her to attend West interviews whenever requested and act as observer. This "tied the plaintiff up pretty tightly" and threatened criminal sanctions if she broke it.

Mr Denyer said this ran contrary to the police assertion that the Gloucestershire constabulary had no control over her as an "independent" appropriate adult, and that she could walk out of an interview at any time.

Simon Freedland, for the chief constable of Gloucestershire, argued that the county court had been right to reject Mrs Leach's claim. She had been appointed to advise and assist West and not the police, and thus the relationship was between her and West.

"It was at the express wishes of the defendant [West] that she returned to attend further interviews with the police."

Mr Freedland said there was "no compulsion and no coercion" on Mrs Leach. She had been free to walk out when the interviews became "particularly grisly".

The judges reserved their judgment, saying they would give their decision at a later date.



MILLENNIUM EXPERIENCE

The £140,000 logo symbolising the Millennium Festival

'New Britannia' logo projects modern image to the world

A"NEW Britannia" logo, another figure looking into the future, was unveiled yesterday as the £140,000 logo which will symbolise the Millennium Dome around the world.

The figure will appear on promotional material, flags and tickets.

The model to be built inside the exhibition in Greenwich, south-east London is straddling the meridian line and moving from the darkness of the old millennium into the future.

The dome is represented by the crescent-shaped tail of the star overarching the figure.

The design will be used to link together all Millennium Festival events and other celebrations nationwide.

The figure has already been dubbed "New Britannia", symbolising a 21st century equivalent to the traditional trident-wielding figurehead used to represent Britain.

Demand for shake-up in child benefit

Week Chaudhury
Education Correspondent

CHILD benefit paid to the parents of children aged 16-19 in full-time education should be given directly to the youngsters as an incentive to continue studying, says a report on the future of further education.

The House of Commons education select committee report published yesterday estimates that between £30 and £40 per week could be paid to more than a million students in sixth forms or further education colleges if the Government changed the way it pays child benefit.

About £800 million could be raised by diverting payments from parents to students, supplementing the £300 million local authorities spend supporting full-time students aged 16-19.

Introducing means-tested systems could raise another £1 billion a year, giving an overall total of nearly £2 billion.

Margaret Hodge, Labour MP for Barking and chairwoman of the committee, said that paying young people to continue studying would help those from the poorest backgrounds. She said that for too long further education had been the Cinderella of the British system.

"The objective is to encourage that group of students least likely to be in full-time education and training. If we are to succeed in widening participation then we need to improve the system of support in further education," she said.

The report calls for an extra £500 million to be invested in further education if the Government is to fulfil one of its important pledges — placing

an extra 500,000 students in further and higher education. Most of these extra students are expected to go to FE colleges.

An extra £50 million is needed to help improve buildings and equipment, particularly in information technology, the report says.

The further education sector is already closely monitoring Whitehall's spending review, which, it hopes, could lead to a re-directing of funds.

Universities are anxious they should not be squeezed by diversion of funds to further education colleges.

The report makes 50 recommendations, most of which were given a cautious reception by politicians and those in education.

Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman, said: "The lack of demand for resources will send a clear message to the Government that it can solve the funding crisis in further education relatively painlessly."

Paul Mackney, general secretary of Naffes, the lecturers' union, said: "The select committee report has put a price tag on a central message that it can solve the funding crisis in further education by diverting funds to further education to build a system we can all take pride in."

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals warned the Government to avoid the temptation of depriving higher education of resources and diverting them to further education.

Diana Warwick, the committee's chief executive, said: "New public funds must be found for both further and higher education. Robbing Peter to pay Paul will not meet the aspirations of a society eager to learn."

Green protesters turn their fire on 'super' watering-hole

Martin Walowright

FOR the first time, environmental campaigners have moved from road protests and tree camps to occupy a deserted city centre building earmarked for use as a 'superpub'.

Thirty squatters have taken over the former pottery school of Leeds art college, changing locks, redecorating rooms and opening an informal 'arts centre and cafe'.

A temporary craft gallery has also been launched by the group in a studio of the 15,000 sq ft building, used by the artist Damien Hirst when he studied at Leeds College of Art.

"It's a stand against the waste of buildings like this," said Dave Parker, aged 25, one of the group who took part in recent protests at the

site of Newbury bypass and Manchester airport's new runway. "They shouldn't stand empty, as the pottery school has for two years. But is it any better if they turn into another huge-price drinking place or rip-off club? We're just glad that by squatting this building, we're saving Leeds from yet another theme pub for a while."

The pottery school is expected to become a Walkabout Inn, an Australian theme pub, run by Regent Inns.

Civil proceedings are expected to give the group several weeks to make its point and seek more conventional local allies.

Concern has been growing in cities at the rapid growth of "superpubs", with brewery chains converting large central premises into huge, open-plan drinking places aimed at the high-spending young.



Making waves: the Marine Conservation Society says Britain's beaches are a national disgrace PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN WILDSOGE

Blue Flags fly on record number of beaches

Standards still way behind other countries, says **Jamie Wilson**

A RECORD number of British beaches have been awarded the European Blue Flag environmental award, despite reports describing the country's beaches as a national disgrace.

A total of 45 beaches were considered good enough in terms of water standards and amenities, compared with 38 last year.

"The Blue Flags show that we are making real progress and that the UK

has some of the best beaches in Europe," said Dr Trevor Dixon, marine adviser to the Tidy Britain Group, which co-ordinates the award in the UK. "Fifteen years ago we only had a handful of Blue Flags. At one point Luxembourg — a landlocked country — had more awards than we but since then we have made real progress."

Of the beaches recognised by the European Blue Flag Campaign, 23 are in Eng-

land, 13 in Wales, two in Scotland and seven in Northern Ireland. Six UK marinas have also been awarded flags — three in England, two in Wales and one in Northern Ireland.

Britain still has some way to go, however, compared with other European countries. Spain heads the league table with 369 Blue Flag beaches, followed by Italy, 342, and Greece, 326.

Dr Dixon said 10 per cent of Britain's beaches failed to meet recommended standards.

Chris Davis of the Marine Conservation Society, compilers of the Readers Digest

Good Beach Guide, which recently described some beaches as a national disgrace, said: "We do support the awards, but it must be remembered that there are many other beaches in the country that are not fit for bathing. We would like to see a scheme with the same standards awarded for rural beaches as well as resort beaches."

Pamela Taylor, chief executive of Water UK, the trade association for the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish water industries, said: "No-one is doing more than the water industry to improve water quality

around our coasts but we're not pretending everything is perfect. It's important to recognise we can't control agricultural pollution and we can't control maritime pollution. All we can control are the discharges from our own system."

The Blue Flag is awarded in 19 countries for resort beaches and marinas with high standards of environmental management. Criteria include cleanliness, dog control, wheelchair access, facilities and lifesaving equipment. Beaches must also reach bathing water standards set by the European Union.

BSE expert criticises research programme

James Meikle

AN ADVISER to the Government on BSE and its human equivalent, CJD, yesterday criticised the Ministry of Agriculture for "holes" in its research programme.

Professor John Collinge was critical of the ministry's continued failure to check how widespread BSE might be in cattle before the clinical signs were evident.

Because of this, it was not possible to tell precisely what risk the public had been exposed to from infection in the past. Cattle under 30 months old were barred from the human food chain two years ago, and incubation of BSE in cows is thought to be about five years.

Brains, spinal columns and other thought to be highly infective were removed from the food chain eight years ago. But Professor Collinge, of Imperial College, London, told the BSE inquiry of the possibility other tissues, including muscle, might be infected by BSE at "sub-clinical" level.

BMA told to rate doctors by success of operations

Sarah Housley
Health Correspondent

DOCTORS urgently need a means of comparing their own performance with that of their peers so that they can be sure they are up to the job and to prevent a case like that of the Bristol heart babies occurring again, consultants were told yesterday.

James Johnson, chairman of the consultants and specialists committee of the British Medical Association, told their conference that doctors must be given figures for death rates and other outcomes from treatment and operations to see how well they are doing.

"Those doctors with results which fall short of these norms would wish to take urgent action to improve the results," he said. "Where the outcome was an unacceptable mortality for instance, it might be necessary for the clinician concerned together

with clinical and medical directors to decide to stop performing the procedure until corrective action could be taken."

At Bristol, James Wisheart and Janardan Dhasmana carried on operating despite warnings from colleagues that their death rates in heart operations on babies were too high. The General Medical Council found last Friday. The chief executive of the United Bristol Healthcare Trust, John Roylance, was found not to have used his powers to stop them.

While he would not comment on the Bristol case because the GMC has yet to sentence the doctors, Mr Johnson said there were "major implications for all of us".

Speaking outside the conference hall, he said measures of clinical outcome did not exist.

Although the medical royal colleges are now trying to collate them, it would be a long and costly business.

"People find it amazing that we don't have the data, but it is nevertheless the fact. It is not just the doctors. It is the profession as a whole. And the Government is going to have to pay for it."

He wanted doctors to have targets. If the death rate across the country in a certain operation was between 5 and 15 per cent, then a doctor whose rate was 10 per cent could be reassured, he said. But he was against league tables.

An editorial in today's British Medical Journal, which is carrying several articles reflecting on aspects of the Bristol case, says it has sent "nothing short of an earthquake through British medicine, and the reverberations are likely to be felt for years".

Some papers in the Journal look at the difficulties in monitoring doctors' successes and failures. Jan Polonski, lecturer in statistics at St George's Hospital Medical School, London, points out that comparisons of death

rates will be misleading if different types of patients and illnesses are not taken into account.

And he points out that even if all surgeons were about equally good, half of them would have to be below average, while one would be the worst in the country.

Rudolf Klein, professor of social policy at Bath university, comments that the Government did not choose to hold an inquiry into what was an entire system failure at the Bristol royal infirmary in advance of the hearings of the General Medical Council into the doctors' professional standards.

"Had it done so," he says, "the GMC might have had a simpler task, and any consequent disciplinary proceedings might have been less protracted, less stressful and less expensive for all concerned. It would be difficult to exaggerate the strains imposed by the case on the defendants and those hearing the charges."

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Red face for Beckham . . .

England's dressing room dilemma

. . . and pink skins for the lads



David Beckham and Posh Spice leave punters wondering who is wearing the trousers

Nick Hopkins describes how a midfielder spiced up his image with some nifty sartorial footwork

EVERY non-Manchester United supporter has known it for a while, but even the Old Trafford faithful will have to believe it now. David Beckham really is a big girl's blouse.

With courageous disregard for his credibility on the terraces, the 25-year-old England midfielder stepped out in a sarong on Wednesday night, ensuring he and his girlfriend, Posh Spice — aka Victoria Adams — remained firmly on the front pages.

Beckham said nothing about the garment when the couple were caught on camera strolling to the Hotel Eze in Nice, France, for a quiet dinner.

Certain facts, though, have emerged since then. The stunt was parodied by the comedians Frank Skinner and David Baddiel (right). United fans will be relieved to hear the sarong was not another variation of his club's ever-changing



strip but something he had picked up for £115 from a Jean Paul Gantier women's collection. Yesterday the fashion and football worlds reflected on Beckham's choice of clothes, and both concluded that "the boy had brains".

Wayne Hemingway, founder of the clothes company Red or Dead, said sarongs were not "in", as far as he knew. "It's not something I would have worn. However, all credit to him. He has more style than I thought."

"British men are very anal about wearing anything that looks like a skirt, but in other countries sarongs are accepted. He'd look daft wearing it in Glasgow, but in the south of France it looked fine."

"He had probably just come off the beach, so it was a sensible and practical choice. Footballers are

Sarah Boseley
Health Correspondent

JUST when you thought every conceivable obstacle to England's success in the World Cup had been exhaustively canvassed, the medicals came up with another. The official strip is too thin to protect either team or fans from sunburn.

The appalling prospect of Steve McManaman getting a scorching or ginger-haired Paul Scholes keeling over during a crucial tackle was raised in an article in the prestigious Lancet medical journal yesterday.

Consultant dermatologist Andrew Wright from St Luke's Hospital, Bradford, said he and colleagues looked at the England strip because it seemed very thin. They found that its sun protection was no more than the equivalent of factor 5 or 10 sunscreen. In Australia, which classifies the ultra-violet protection value of clothing, the lowest acceptable category is equivalent to factor 20.

Dr Wright, who is a member of the UK Skin Cancer Working Party, said: "The last thing we want to see is a player like Alan Shearer, who is more at risk being fair-

skinned, getting sunburnt on the training field or in a real game."

But the researchers are also concerned about the fans staring in the hot sun of the south of France, where England play some of their early games and where the temperature could approach 100°F. And they are particularly worried about the children who will be wearing the coveted strip all summer.

"We teach people to put clothes on as an effective form of sunblock," he said, "but thin clothes offer little protection." The England strip, made of thin 65 per cent polyester, was not the only culprit. Sports shirts in general were an inadequate block to harmful rays, he said. "I'm not getting of Umbro."

Umbro was not happy, however. "The shirts are for a specific purpose — playing football — so you would expect them to be lightweight," said a spokesman. "I would not have thought there was a chance of a player getting sunburnt running around in the shirt for 90 minutes or even a couple of hours in the event of extra time."

"I would imagine a fan wearing one would have to walk around in the sunshine for a very long time to feel any adverse reaction. The FA

are completely happy with the shirts and we are completely happy with them."

But the Lancet paper suggests that the Umbro shirt would not prevent a fair-skinned Brit spending three hours in the French sun in June from getting too large a dose of ultra-violet rays.

"With the provision of large outdoor screens for non-ticket holders, a high proportion of supporters are likely to spend extended periods in stroog sunlight."

Water, from perspiration or humidity, would further reduce their protection.

The team tested a child's replica T-shirt, because children are at particular risk. There is strong evidence to suggest that sunburn in childhood can cause more damage than at any other time and increase the risk of skin cancers in adulthood.

"You get a lot of exposure to the sun as a child, out playing all the time," Dr Wright added. "Some studies suggest you get most of your exposure before the age of 15 when you are always out in the playground or the garden."

The answer to the thin strip, he said, is to wear either other clothes or sun cream underneath, which the team may find a slippery experience.



Dodgy defence . . . team strip may not keep out southern sun

No charges over death of refugee

Owen Bowcott

NO police officers are to be charged over the case of the Nigerian asylum seeker Shiji Lapite, who died after being kicked in the head, hit and restrained in a cell held, the Crown Prosecution Service ruled yesterday.

Confirmation of the original decision, which severely embarrassed the director of the CPS, Dame Barbara Mills, when it was challenged in the High Court last year, infuriated campaigners for greater accountability over deaths in police custody.

The case of Mr Lapite, a 34-year-old father of two who died in Stoke Newington, north London, in December 1994, was one of three taken to judicial review by lawyers seeking clarification of the CPS procedure in deciding whether to bring charges.

At the hearing last July, Dame Barbara Mills, who has now agreed to step down from her post following criticism of CPS administration, admitted errors had been made and agreed to review the decision.

But in a brief statement yesterday, the CPS said: "After painstaking consideration the chief crown prosecutor for central case work has decided there is insufficient evidence to prosecute any police officer."

Five pathologists involved in the original decision were consulted again. "None of them were able to state, without reservation, that compression of the neck was a substantial cause of Mr Lapite's death or that any act of a police officer caused his death."

Of the three cases brought to judicial review last year, only one has resulted in officers being prosecuted — three are awaiting trial over the death of Richard O'Brien in south London in 1994.

An inquest into Mr Lapite's death in 1996 returned a finding of unlawful killing.

Raju Bhatt, the solicitor for the Lapite family, said he was not surprised by the decision. "We shall be exploring other legal avenues," he said.

Mr Lapite's widow, Olamide, was "upset and angry" at the decision. "We hoped we would get justice," she said.

Mr Lapite was stopped by two plain clothes constables for "acting suspiciously". They claimed he had dropped two rocks of cocaine behind a tree and became violent when they went to retrieve them.

"They admitted kicking, biting and using a neck hold to restrain him."

Publication of the report of Judge Gerald Butler's inquiry into CPS decision making has been delayed to avoid prejudicing the trial of the three officers charged in the O'Brien case.



Smear test victim Angela Drew: Seeking surrogate mother

Trust sued over smears

Sarah Boseley on bitter legal dispute over compensation

TWELVE women who were victims of Britain's largest smear test blunder, at Keel and Canterbury hospitals in the early 1990s, are starting legal proceedings against the NHS trust today over compensation.

Their solicitor, Sarah Harman, said she regretted having to go to court "because we had hoped that the trust's promises in February last year that matters would be dealt with sympathetically would be kept. But we have found that in individual cases, the trust is unwilling to accept liability."

An inquiry into the scandal by Sir William Walls reported in January that eight women had died and 30 undergone major surgery after pre-cancerous cells were not detected. Over 91,000 women's smear tests from 1990-1995 were rescreened.

Among the women taking legal action today is Angela Drew, aged 39, whose dreams of having a family have been shattered. After radical surgery for a cancer that the trust admitted was missed by the screeners, she now has no womb. She is asking the trust for an urgent payment to fund a surrogate pregnancy.

When her invasive cancer was discovered last year, the only option was a radical hysterectomy. The surgeon, at her request, conserved her ovaries. She is now looking for a surrogate mother for the child she and her partner, Shane, will attempt to conceive through IVF.

The trust has admitted liability for wrongly reporting Ms Drew's smear test in 1992 as negative and is negotiating compensation. But although her fertility specialist has said that because of her age she must undergo IVF as soon as possible, the trust is refusing to give her an interim payment to help with the high costs. They argue the tumour may have been sufficiently large back in 1992 for her to have lost her fertility even if the smear had been correctly read.

Ms Drew is appalled at their attitude. "They made the mistakes. Through that I have been robbed of my right to have children. The only way they can put it right is by giving me the money to pay for my surrogate treatment."

"They know the urgency of it. . . two to three years down the road is no good." The cost of surrogacy is at least £10,000, and the IVF treatment will add thousands more to the bill.

Brachers, the solicitors for the trust, wrote to Ms Harman: "We put you on notice that the trust will resist any

claim in respect of surrogacy fees." If Ms Drew's loss of fertility was found to have resulted from the poor performance of the smear test screeners, then compensation would be paid. But they added: "A surrogacy arrangement is an unenforceable and illegal contract and will not be compensated by the trust."

Ms Drew, of Ramsgate, is in the entertainment business. She and her partner take their magic and illusion act, known as Zane, to clubs, theatres and on cruise liners.

In 1986, she went to her GP, concerned about bleeding. She was told it was cervical erosion, something that could be sorted out with a small operation. In February, she was one of many women who had received a letter from the Keel and Canterbury NHS Trust, wrongly telling her that her last smear test had been rescreened and was clear. While she and Shane took the act to the Mediterranean and Caribbean, the operation got postponed.

On July 22, she went to see a consultant. "He said I'm 95 per cent sure you have cancer and will have to have a radical hysterectomy."

The trust has denied liability for the cancers of four of the other women taking legal action, saying the cell changes which were not picked up by their screeners were too small to be noticed.

A trust spokesman said all cases where liability was not in dispute had been settled.

Cup ticket scam feared

John Duncan
Sports Correspondent

UP TO 25,000 World Cup fans may have been the victims of a huge London ticket touting scam, the Department of Trade and Industry said last night as it moved to close down the operation.

The High Court was told that the firm, Great Portland Estates Ltd, had taken £24 million in cash from 40,000 British football fans. "We have no indications that any of those people have received tickets," said a DTI spokesman.

A Westminster council trading standards authority raid indicated that the company was dealing in 15,000 tickets, which could mean a further 25,000 fans have

handed over cash but may not get tickets.

The DTI yesterday presented a petition in the High Court to wind up the company following an investigation. The DTI had been made aware that "tickets had not been delivered in accordance with contracts".

The Consumer Affairs Minister, Nigel Griffiths, explained the petition was presented following an investigation "where a number of matters remained unanswered".

The investigations started several months ago alongside inquiries by Westminster trading standards authority. However, the DTI could not move before yesterday because it is not illegal to resell tickets for matches outside Britain. "We took action only because they had given

undertakings to deliver by a certain date and have not."

"That gave us what we needed to convince the court that action needed to be taken in the public interest straight away."

The court petition follows a TV documentary last week which alleged the company had fuelled an international black market in World Cup tickets, buying up half of the Cameroon FA's 7,500 allocation as well as from French nationals and corporate sponsors.

The programme alleged the company had paid £400,000 to a bank account controlled by the president of the Cameroon Football Federation, Vincent Anoma. Mr Anoma confirmed he had given a representative of the company, 3,500-3,600 tickets.

'Kidnap' theatre slammed by Lamplugh trust

Interactive audience role 'blatant attempt to glamorise' crime

Don Glaister
Arts Correspondent

IF IT was designed to provoke shock and outrage it has succeeded. Kidnap, a project by the radical theatre group Blast Theory, which promises its audience the thrills and excitement of a real kidnap, has been condemned by the Suez Lamplugh Trust as "a blatant attempt to glamorise kidnapping".

Unlike other depictions of kidnapping, Kidnap takes an interactive approach. Audience members are invited to register, for £10, as potential

kidnap victims. A draw is made and the two winners are "snatched in broad daylight", according to the prospectus.

They are held for 48 hours at a secret location, then released unharmed. Volunteers can select from a menu of options, ranging from a jam doughnut for 40p, or verbal abuse for £3, to an interrogation for £9 and secretarial support at £23. More exotic options include a choice of kidnappers — Nazis, New York cops or clowns — and a story at bedtime.

The audience can watch the kidnap on the Internet, with live relays from the two safe houses at which victims are held. Victims can use a password to end the performance at any time. Volunteers who escape before the 48 hours expires win £500.

The trust, which was set up to draw attention to the dangers facing women working alone after the disappearance of the 25-year-old estate agent, said: "All these extra options sound like scenes from a horror or pornographic film, except here it will be much more real. How much are these things likely to influence people? How do these people know if the volunteers are unharmed? The idea sounds quite distasteful and fairly sick."

The National Missing

Persons Helpline said: "We urge anyone who is attracted to the scheme to think seriously about the possible distress it could cause. Whether someone is missing for 48 hours or 48 years, the effect on everyone involved can be extremely upsetting. [We] can only condemn this ill-conceived concept."

Matt Adams, a member of Blast Theory, which was established in 1991 and is supported by the Digital Summer festival in Manchester, and by the ICA in London, defended the project. "The issue of consent has been at the forefront of our thinking at every stage. The participants are able to walk away from the kidnapping at any point."

The entry form included

a clause obliging participants to provide certificates of mental and physical health, and first aid and psychological expertise would be available, he said.

In Germany, Der Zeit, one of the country's leading newspapers, said the company was "the most innovative multimedia group in British theatre".

Mr Adams said that the project was being done for artistic reasons. "It primarily invites someone to live their life as if it were a work of fiction for two days." It is a piece of improvised theatre in which the audience members are involved.

He added: "Our intention is not in any way to belittle someone who has suffered a kidnapping."

Daewoo said yesterday it was committed to the highest levels of safety equipment in all its cars, which exceeded all European safety legislation.

Honda said the report had damaged the company.

Euro NCAP, the consortium which co-ordinated the crash test programme, said: "A press release published by the Consumers' Association last week contained several misinterpretations of the latest Euro NCAP results. It does not represent the views of Euro NCAP."

The Guardian Friday June 5 1998

Hand for like-up in ld benefit

an extra 300,000 students further and higher education. Most of these extra students are expected to go to colleges.

An extra 300 million needed to help improve living and equipment, particularly in information technology, the report says.

The further education sector is already close to a review, which, it hopes, will lead to a re-directing of funds. Universities are also being asked to consider the possibility of diversion of funds to other education colleges.

The report makes 30 recommendations, most of which are given a cautious endorsement by politicians and the education sector.

Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman, said: "The lack of domestic resources will send a clear message to the Government that it can solve the crisis in further education relatively painlessly."

Paul Mackney, general secretary of Nuffield, the teachers' union, said: "The committee report has a price tag on a central notion of the learning nation. If the Government seriously committed itself to come up with the money to allow the partners in education to build a nation we can all take pride in."

The Committee of the Chartered Institute of Management Education warned the Government would use the temporary dip in higher education resources and divert it to further education.

Diana Warwick, the chief executive of the National Public Health Service, said: "We need to ensure that the system of higher education is not undermined by the government's policy of cutting public funds."

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protesters turn their 'super' watering-h

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The most secret crime

'Child protection is not macho. Those who are involved in it are looked at askance by Met police officers' —
Det Supt Ed Williams (retired)

Victims' hopes that are lost

In the final part of our major investigation into paedophilia, **Nick Davies** looks at how attempts to catch abusers are hampered by a system that too often fails to detect, prosecute or convict offenders

The most secret crime

DANIEL Handley was unlucky. He was riding his bike near his home in the East End of London one dark Sunday afternoon in October 1994 when he was spotted by two men who had gone out in their car that day with the intention of finding a boy whom they could abduct and rape and kill. Daniel died that evening. He was nine.

Infanticide by a stranger is one of the rarest crimes in the country and it was the rareness of Daniel's fate, as well as its nastiness, which caused such shock and which inspired the Metropolitan Police to invest a huge effort in finding those responsible.

But three and a half years later, with Tim Morris and Brett Tyler serving life sentences from which they have been released, the man who caught them looks back with little satisfaction.

Detective Superintendent Ed Williams, now retired, recalls, for example, that early in his inquiry he contacted the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) to get a list of all known paedophiles in the area. This should have been a leap forward, since — as events finally proved — one of the killers worked in the area and the other lived there.

In reality, however, neither showed up on the NCIS list because, overwhelmingly, it was out of date and inaccurate. "Frankly," says Williams, "it was a hindrance to our inquiry."

Williams goes on to describe how he tried to call up the files from Operation Orchid, the inquiry into paedophiles (including Robert Oliver and Sidney Cooke) who had raped and killed at least three young boys in the East

End of London 10 years earlier and who, as events finally revealed, were linked indirectly to Daniel's killers. Williams had hoped that somebody in the intelligence department would have collated the information that Orchild had gathered. He was wrong. Not only had the Orchild intelligence been left without any kind of analysis, it had been lost.

This was not a complete surprise. Williams had recently carried out an audit of sex offender files in one of London's eight police areas and discovered that more than 30 per cent of the files involving serious offences were nowhere to be found. When he turned for help to the Scientific Intelligence Unit at Scotland Yard, which is supposed to collate intelligence on all sex attacks, he found it consisted of only one officer and one secretary.

"It is outrageous," he said. "One officer cannot possibly absorb and assimilate all of the data that comes in from the whole metropolitan area. It's an impossible task."

Williams, who has had long experience of investigating child abuse, has come to a conclusion. "The response is inadequate," he told me. "We are not doing enough."

The abuse of children is, in itself, frightening. When you lift the lid and peer down into this hidden reservoir of suffering, when you start to glimpse the unbelievable scenes of torment and despair, when you begin to take in the sheer scale of child abuse in this country, it is hard to accept.

But a deeper anxiety starts when you stand back and look instead at the intricate defences we have built, the sprawling complex of laws and guidelines, all strapped together with checks and threats, all designed to pre-

vent any more children falling into this pit, all of them run by thousands of men and women, most of whom are extraordinarily dedicated and passionate about their work and almost of all whom say the same thing as Ed Williams: "It doesn't work."

And when you hear this said not only by social workers and police officers and Customs specialists, who spend every day of their working lives at the edge of this pit, but also by senior government officials, learned academics, powerful law enforcement officers, when over and over again they say that the power is with the paedophiles, then finally you begin to see the real horror — that we have put our trust in a child protection system that doesn't protect the children.

You see it in Cardiff where, in 1989, a British Transport police officer opened a locker in the bus station and found a suitcase full of photographs of naked children in sexual poses. He passed it to the police and social services, who did nothing for seven years.

This suitcase would have lain forever unattended if detectives who were following up complaints from the local children's homes had not finally decided to check it and found a treasure trove of leads which they are still pursuing.

You see it in Newcastle in the Lindisfarne Children's Forensic Centre where, on two different occasions recently, they have treated two-year-old girls who have been suffering from gonorrhoea. They did everything they possibly could for the two girls but, on both occasions, the men who had done this to them walked away unpunished and unchanged.

You see it, too, in the notorious case of Robert Oliver,



Det Supt Ed Williams: 'The response to child abuse is inadequate.' PHOTOGRAPH: BARRY BATCHELOR

the predatory paedophile who was released from prison last year and disowned by one police force after another — driven across the border in a police car from Thames Valley to London; shovelled on to a train out of town by Manchester police; finally, taken on by Sussex police, whose chief constable Paul Whitehouse eventually persuaded

him to enter an institution for treatment.

The short story is that most child abusers are never detected; most of those few who are detected are not prosecuted and most of them are not convicted.

The system has been pushed off track by the combination of two simple facts about child abuse: it is wide-

spread, almost epidemic in scale, involving, at a conservative estimate, 1.1 million offenders; and it is hidden, less often reported by its victims than any other offence and less often corroborated. The result is that at every stage the normal procedures are inclined to fail to detect the abuse and to deal with the perpetrator.

'At best police forces demonstrate an ambivalent attitude towards child protection work, and one police service was reported to be openly obstructive'

Home Office report

Only 15 years ago, the Government was refusing even to acknowledge the existence of the secret epidemic. Michelle Elliott, the American doctor who runs the Kidscape charity, recalls with fury how in the early 1980s she asked a senior Whitehall official why the Government refused to add sexual abuse to the official list of reasons why a child might be registered as being at risk. "He said that the United States might have a problem with this, but they didn't come across enough cases here to justify recognising it."

Now, even though Whitehall has finally moved, the fact that this crime is largely unreported has produced a devastating weakness in the police response. One of the most senior officers in child protection nationally told the Guardian bitterly: "All of the Home Office key objectives are about clearing up reported crime. There is no incentive at all to deal with unreported crime."

The effect of this was illustrated dramatically in 1985 when two senior detectives in Kilburn, Roger Gaspar and John Lewis, decided to ditch normal procedure. A social worker had reported a suspected incident of abuse. Instead of dealing simply with

this one reported crime, the two detectives decided to dig. The more they dug, the more they found. Eventually, they uncovered 653 allegations of abuse in Kilburn. They charged 20 different adults with serious offences and prosecuted them in a series of three major trials.

When the inquiry closed, the two detectives produced an internal paper. It was entitled 'People Not Property' and it argued the case for setting up a central, pro-active unit to dig out evidence of hidden child abuse.

They pointed out that Scotland Yard's specialist squads were all devoted to protecting property, because a crime against property is nearly always reported — arts and antiques, cheques, counterfeit currency, stolen cars, fridges, robberies, burglaries. They wanted a squad that paid attention to people, not property. They said they could gather intelligence by visiting runaway children who had returned home, or victims of abuse who had had time to recover, or convicted paedophiles who were serving sentences. Once they had the intelligence, they could target the suspects.

It took years of pressure and a series of other reports before Scotland Yard finally agreed to set up a small pro-active paedophilia unit which now works primarily by seeking child porn and using it as intelligence to trace the abusers and the children who have been involved in its production. But they are almost alone. West Midlands Police have a similar unit. After dealing with three major inquiries into abuse in children's homes, Cheshire, too, now has a permanent pro-active unit.

Across the rest of the country, however, almost every other chief constable has taken the easy route. In the past 10 years they have all been told to set up child protection units, who rescue children and deal with offenders when incidents are reported. They are widely praised for their work, but emphatically they are not being used to go out and dig up unreported crimes against children.

The Home Office knows all about this weakness. In 1995 they commissioned an inquiry into the policing of child abuse which concluded that they needed "a radical improvement in the invest-

Steady fall in rate of conviction

COURTS: Guidelines that became 'charter for paedophiles'

AN ABUSER who is detected will then enter the criminal justice system, only to enjoy the advantage of a set of structural weaknesses. Even though more abusers are now being reported, the number who are being successfully prosecuted has declined steadily since 1988.

Sir William Utting, who has conducted two searching reviews of child abuse, told a London conference in February that conviction rates of child abusers had declined to alarming levels.

"Patent abusers are not convicted or even prosecuted," he told the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency.

The problem is rooted in the special nature of this hidden epidemic. Even though Whitehall was finally forced by a series of scandals to admit that children were being sexually abused, it did so without shaking off its basic preconception that all this was being frightfully exaggerated by over-zealous social workers.

In the aftermath of several high-profile fiascos, in Nottingham, the Orkneys and Cleveland, when allegations of serious abuse collapsed in procedural chaos, the Department of Health reflected this caution in a Memorandum of Good Practice. It was intended to deliver justice. Ten years later, it is a cliché among specialist police and social workers to call it a "paedophile's charter".

The memorandum's key advice is that interviewers should establish a rapport with the child; that, for fear of tiring and confusing the child, they should interview only once and then only for



The father of one of the children in the Cleveland inquiry: allegations of abuse in these cases collapsed, leading to a significant change in official attitude. PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN REARDON

putting words into their mouths, they should ask the child no leading questions.

Prosecutors and judges have taken the memorandum to heart and routinely reject any case which breaches any part of this advice.

Earlier this year, for example, a nine-year-old girl who had complained of being raped by three boys in her primary school toilets, saw her case thrown out by an Old Bailey judge on the grounds that the police officer who interviewed her had asked her one leading question. The same judge had allowed that same girl to endure questioning by professional advocates for more than two days.

In Coventry, police and social services have lodged formal complaints with the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department after a judge threw out a case in which they had invested just over two years' work.

Five adults had been accused of the relentless rape of three young children from babyhood. Each of the three children gave video interviews. There was medical evidence to support their stories, including permanent physical damage. The children's

stories, independently told, corroborated each other. When the case came to court, the barristers for each of the defendants took it in turn to complain about the video interviews, and, in particular, about the fact that the boy had been allowed to go straight into his disclosures without being taken through the "rapport" phase described in the memorandum.

After three and a half days of legal argument, the judge threw out the case without even selecting a jury. The five alleged abusers scattered to different parts of the country.

Tony Butler, the chief constable responsible for policy on abuse, is furious about cases like these. Mr Butler sat on the working group that drafted the memorandum and insists that it was produced as a guide, not as a strict procedure. "That was never intended by Parliament. We have moved so far towards due process, the court system is becoming increasingly concerned about how we do it, not what we do. Children are not getting justice."

Mr Butler says the problem goes deeper, to the conduct of barristers and judges. He told the Guardian: "The sorts of behaviour that are engaged in by defence counsel would on some occasions be declared oppressive if the police had used the same tactics in interviewing the defendant."

"When video evidence was

introduced in 1992, I hoped that judges and barristers would become more familiar with the child witness. Despite some of them being very good, the general experience is that they have failed to achieve a satisfactory level of skill with children."

"If you look at the transcript of a cross examination of a child, the pedantic and staccato language that is used certainly confuses me."

Any child is likely to find the courts hard to deal with. The damage which is suffered by victims of abuse tends to pitch some of them, as adults, into problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, and mental breakdown, which mean that if ever they have the courage to go into the witness box, they are unlikely to give compelling evidence.

The defendant is that the special difficulties of children are not solved, but exploited, by the current system.

In the West Country recently, a man was accused of raping a 13-year-old girl with learning difficulties. When she came to give evidence, the man's barrister began by asking her to count backwards from 20 and then to spell various words. Hampered by learning problems, she made mistakes and became confused.

The defendant was acquitted. The chief constable whose officers investigated the case is lodging a complaint with the Bar Council.

Mr Butler wants child witnesses to be supported by an intermediary who can explain questions and help to sort out an answer in front of the court.

His views are echoed by the 32 specialist officers who took part in the 1995 Home Office inquiry: they complained that judges were insensitive; barristers engaged in unfair cross-examination; courtrooms were hostile for the children; and "very few investigations led to a conviction".

The inquiry concluded that judges and barristers needed to be trained to specialise in cases of abuse.

AGENCIES: Social workers defeated by prosecution failures

THE structural weaknesses in the policing and prosecution of child abusers have had an unseen effect on the background activity of social workers.

Pauline Colledge, a former social work manager who has spent the last 10 years as a child abuse counsellor, has watched social workers react to the blockage in the courts by rationing their own work.

Anticipating failure, they have stopped submitting cases, and therefore stopped sending abused children for medical examination or for formal interview or any other kind of investigation. The system is seizing up.

Ms Colledge said: "People are meeting the requirements of the courts rather than the child protection issues. Mainly now, my calls are

from people saying, 'We referred it to the social services but we heard nothing from them, they haven't even interviewed the alleged perpetrator. And they haven't done a medical.' Social workers are still battling to protect children, but in some cases I am afraid they have given up on prosecution."

There are some hopeful signs. Customs and Excise have overhauled their approach to child abuse. With ministerial support, they have changed official objectives to allow them to pursue suspects and not simply to seize "guilty goods".

With that policy in place, they have set up specialist units to intercept child pornography at airports, seaports and postal sorting offices; created a national co-ordinator for intelligence on child abuse with a local intelligence specialist in each of their 14 regions; and used this system to detect abusers at the borders and then to work with police to search their homes, uncover their contacts and bring them to court.

Their seizures of child pornography have more than

FOSTERING: Scandal waiting to erupt around children in private homes

THERE are signs that an alarming scandal in the fostering of children is waiting to erupt.

The last 20 years has seen a tidal shift of children away from the big residential homes where so many were abused, and into foster families. This tide has come about primarily as a result of cuts in public spending: a foster place costs roughly one-seventh of the price of a residential placement. The danger is that foster families escape almost the entire network of regulation and monitoring.

The gravest danger surrounds private fostering, where the child protection system provides an open invitation to abusers to enjoy child sex objects in the privacy of their own home. There is no effective obstacle to prevent anyone setting themselves up as foster parents and avoid regulation simply by failing to inform the local authority of what they are doing. Children in these families are, in the words of Sir William Utting's report last year on children in care, "extremely vulnerable and at very considerable risk of abuse."

No one even knows how many children are living in these private foster families. Estimates suggest that there may be as many as 10,000, most of them children from developing countries or eastern Europe who have been sent to Britain for a better education or to learn the language. In his report, Sir William said: "It appears that numbers may be substantial."

He added that among African children lodged with private carers, "it is not unknown for children to be moved without the parents being informed or to 'disappear'."

doubled in the last two years and they count a senior British diplomat and a child psychiatrist among those who have been prosecuted as a result.

The NSPCC is setting up pro-active units to uncover abuse in each of its eight regions. It already has teams in place in London, Wales, and the Home Counties.

The Crown Prosecution Service has speeded up the processing of child abuse cases, and, in most regions, relaxed the controversial advice that no abused child should be allowed to have psychotherapy until they had given evidence at trial.

And despite the general picture of passivity among most police forces, the last five years have seen belated inquiries into children's homes, creation of the pro-active Paedophilia Unit at Scotland Yard, and the beginning of a covert intelligence operation, which is being run from Bournemouth police college to target paedophiles in prison and is credited with several uncelebrated successes, including saving the life of one child.

Parallel to this, there is an extraordinary shadowland of unregistered children's homes which, like private foster families, fall outside most monitoring simply by failing to notify the authorities. Sir William found in 1985 that half the local authorities in the country were using unregistered homes, 14 of them without even knowing it.

Those foster parents who are registered with their local authority are regulated — in theory. However, in practice, according to the National Foster Carers Association, local authorities give them a low priority and few resources. They often fail, for example, to make unannounced spot checks or to take children off on their own to give them a chance to talk freely. The fact that some 90 per cent of registered foster parents are unpaid volunteers means local authorities are reluctant to pressurise them for fear of losing them. If carers fail to co-operate with training or assessment, they are likely to be left alone.

The most secret crime

'The general experience is that judges and barristers have not achieved a satisfactory level of skill with children'

صلى الله عليه وسلم

'At best police forces demonstrate an ambivalent attitude towards child protection work' — Home Office Report



but you can never get anything out."

In the annual report last year, the NCIS said it was holding the details of 25,000 suspected or convicted paedophiles. And yet, according to the Home Office Research Department, there are 108,000 convicted paedophiles in the country. The NCIS does not have the national database on paedophiles but its information on at least 85,000 convicted paedophiles, whose whereabouts, work, activities and associates are all unknown. Quite apart from the estimated 20 million others who have never been convicted.

Tony Butler last month set up a working group of senior police to review the NCIS's performance on paedophilia. "I'm aware of the anxieties operational officers are expressing," he said.

But whether Butler will tackle the underlying problem — that the big resources have gone into the high-profile reported crimes, like drugs and armed robbery. Child abusers command only a small staff member at the NCIS, just football hooligans.

list of faults in the system. In its 1996 inquiry, Childhood Matters, the NSPCC concluded that despite the series of scandals and reports, "the abuses that gave rise to those scandals... having not been detected by such efforts as have been made to prevent them... The legal system, designed to provide justice and redress for victims of abuse, is failing to do so consistently." Involvement of the police, the NSPCC knows that the system is a failure. The Home Office inquiry in 1995 concluded bluntly: "Present arrangements are quite inadequate." The NSPCC's own inquiry, which wrote the report into the Cleveland child abuse scandal, told a conference last year: "There are glaring deficiencies and inadequacies in our system which cry out to be remedied."

The structural failure of the child protection system is obvious not only to all these experts, but also to the estimated two million children in the UK who suffer abuse — to the hundreds of thousands who are raped by parents or step-parents, to the 45,000 who live in some kind of care, to the uncounted thousands who work as prostitutes and the hundreds of thousands who live in inner city areas, to the hundreds of thousands of others who have trusted priests or teachers or doctors who then used them as sex aids — and to the families of children like Daniel Harbeck, out alone in the darkness. And all this is known in Whitehall.

In Belgium, the families whose children were abducted and murdered by a paedophile ring while the authorities stood flat-footed in the background, quote Einstein: "The world is dangerous to live in, not because of evil but because of those who look on and let them do so."

The NSPCC National Child Protection Helpline offers a free 24-hour counselling, information and advice service on 0800 800 500.

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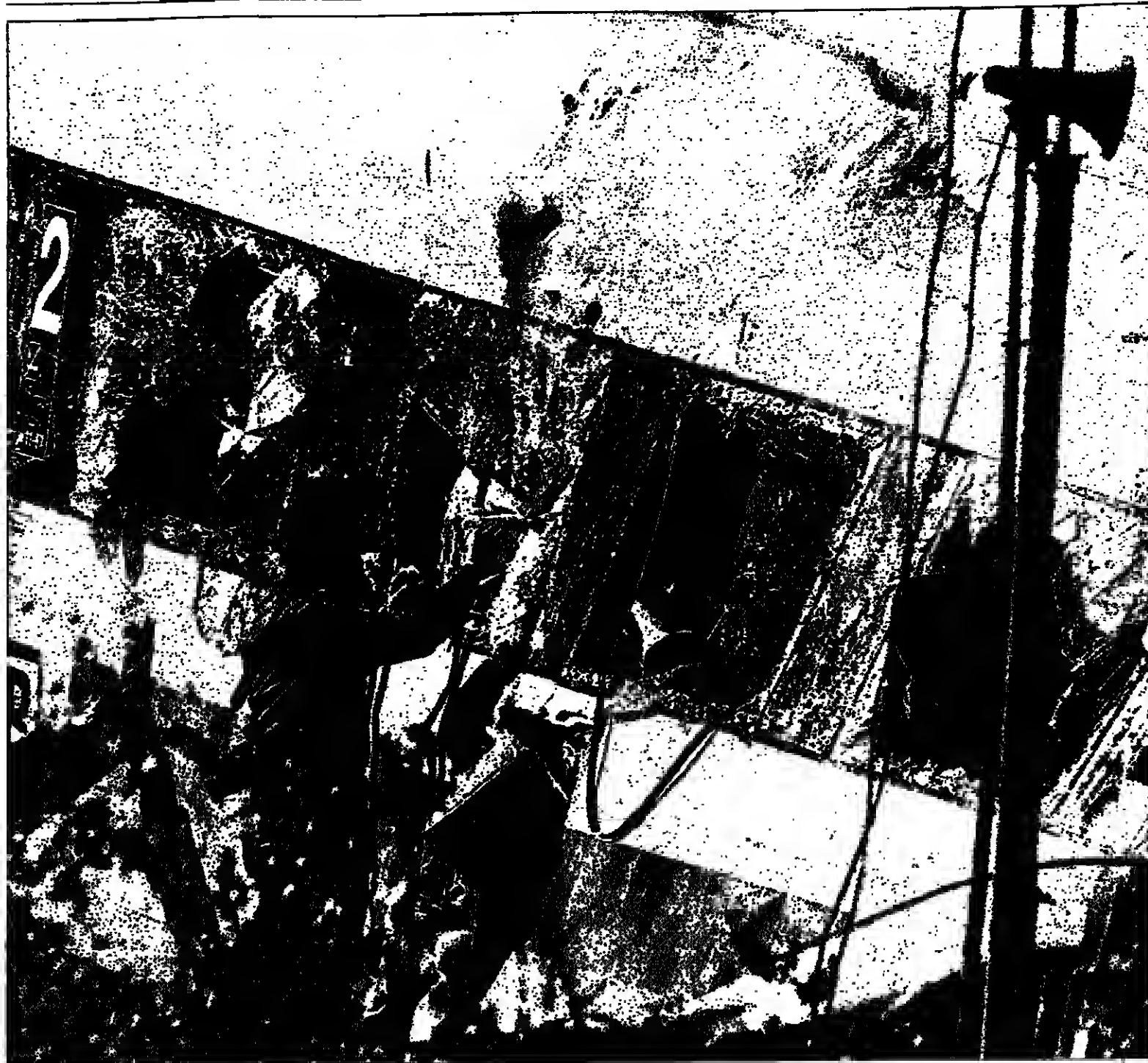
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A policeman examines the remains of the train that derailed in the northern German town of Eschede, killing at least 90 people. PHOTOGRAPH: REINHARD KRAUSE



Flowers have been placed at a buffer stop on a brake check device at the end of the tracks as an Inter City Express train arrives in Munich station yesterday. PHOTOGRAPH: PETER KNEPPEL

Germany grieves for anonymous victims

Denis Staunton in Eschede

THE people of Eschede gathered last night in their local church to remember people they had never met and to mourn those whose names they do not yet know. The tragedy that hit this small town on Wednesday is all the more difficult to grasp because its victims met their deaths quite by chance in a place few had heard of. Relatives of the dead and injured started arriving yesterday but many victims remain to be identified. Trains don't carry passenger lists and few of those travelling speak the local language. The rescue work of the federal border guard. "It was mid-morning in the middle of the week, so there was no need to reserve a seat. Unfortunately, this makes it hard for us to work out exactly who was on the train," said Jörg Haslinger, who is leading the rescue work of the federal border guard. Most of the rescue effort focussed on freeing the last two carriages trapped under rubble yesterday. Reports that they were carrying two parties of schoolchildren appeared to be unfounded, but the carriages, one a dining

car, bore most of the impact of the crash and were crushed to 15 per cent of their size. "The people crushed inside there will be very difficult to identify because many of them may only be parts of people," Mr Haslinger said. "We have highly skilled forensic experts from the federal criminal office working closely with pathologists. But it may be weeks or even months before we can identify everyone." The carriages were still trapped beneath the concrete bridge when Germany's president, Roman Herzog, and the chancellor, Helmut Kohl, arrived yesterday. Broken carriages were strewn across the track, some ripped open as if made of cardboard, others overturned to expose an angry tangle of wheels and cables. The plush blue seats and personal entertainment consoles that were a key feature of the Inter City Express were poking out of shattered windows. Most of the passengers' belongings had been removed by the afternoon. The rescue operation has been a model of its kind — calm, swift and efficient. The mood in Eschede was subdued, with locals speaking in hushed tones out of respect for the victims of the crash. Joachim Gries was back at

the scene of the disaster yesterday after a couple of hours sleep. He had rushed there from his house on Wednesday when he heard a loud thump. "There was a great cloud of dust over the scene, and it took a minute or two to make out the pieces of luggage and clothing lying around. I heard cries and moans and went to help a woman I saw lying there. The man beside her was completely still, and next to him was a child," he said. Mr Gries and other volunteers can seek counselling from 50 pastors who arrived in Eschede yesterday. Ordinary Germans have been gripped by the catastrophe, with viewing figures for the evening news reports on Wednesday evening exceeding the record set by coverage of Princess Diana's death. Many have spoken of feeling close to the anonymous passengers on the train. Mr Gries said his most enduring memory of the rescue effort was trying to keep the injured alive as he carried them from the wreckage and up the bank next to the track. "I just kept talking to them. You don't want someone to die in your arms. So I just said anything I could think of," he said. "All they ever said was: 'I want to get out of here, I want to get out'."

Nation pauses over its need for speed

Faster trains to shave minutes off journey times mean higher death tolls when things go wrong. Maybe it is time to ask where all this technology is taking us, writes Ian Traynor

GERMANS are addicted to the fast life. Mercedes, BMWs and Audis scream up the outside lane of the autobahn, headlights glaring to clear more timid spirits from their turbo-charged path. The country's motorways are unique in Europe in having no speed limits, a regime the German driver regards as an inalienable birthright. Cheap charters combined with traditional wanderlust put Germans at the top of the travellers' league in the age of mass tourism. And seven years of air-conditioned luxury aboard the new generation of high-speed trains have led to a rail revival as hours are shaved from travelling times. But, with flags at half-mast yesterday in mourning for the victims of the Eschede rail disaster, the high-pressure, high-speed culture of modern Germany shuddered to a gruesome, if temporary, halt. For years, the German railway's 104 sleek Inter City Expresses — replete with phones, video, restaurants and children's play areas — have been carrying 65,000 people a day across the country at high speed in sound-proof, pressurised carriages. They are successful and popular and, until 11am on Wednesday, were considered safe. The ICE trains

are running faster and faster. The current top speed of 178mph will be bettered next year when 43 upgraded trains, which run 30 per cent faster and bend like motorbikes into the curves, come into service. By early next century, the magnetically levitated Transrapid train will be hovering above the ground between Hamburg and Berlin and rocketing to the German capital at 280mph, cutting the current three-hour trip to 55 minutes. The pressure to go faster is unrelenting, driven by consumer demand, the national railway's survival strategy and strong competition from the air and car industries. "In our modern societies and in our integrated Europe, we want to get from one metropolis to another as quickly as possible," said Frank Weingarten of Traffic Forum, a Bonn lobby group for the transport industries. "It's speed that matters. This is increasingly impossible by car because of congestion." But the torsos and limbs being dragged from the Eschede rubble give many pause for thought. "We don't yet know the cause of this terrible accident," Mr Weingarten said, "but whatever, it's an absolute catastrophe for the German railways." If speed is the drug, the junkies, of course, are not confined to Germany. "It was the French who started fast European rail travel with the TGV, the Germans followed and the British are now following too, with the Channel Tunnel and the high-speed connection," said Werner Kammer, manager of the Society for Rational Transport Policy based in Düsseldorf. "It is true that the autobahn with its lack of speed limits, or merely recommended speed limits, is unique to Germany," said Eckhart Dyckerhoff, a traffic safety analyst in Munich for Germany's main car association, Adac. "But all our societies are demanding shorter travelling times. Of course, the higher the speed, the higher the risk." In the age of the high-speed train snaking its way across Europe, the disaster scenario changes dramatically. "The safety rate is high but, if one of these trains crashes at high speed, it is no longer like a traditional road or rail accident. The impact is huge, like an air crash." With almost 9,000 people killed in more than 2 million road traffic accidents in Germany each year, the balance is overwhelmingly in favour of air and rail safety — by a factor of at least 20. The air crash or the high-speed rail disaster, none the less, is spectacular and exerts greater morbid fascination. And most of us, it seems, accept the risks of living in the fast lane, seeing the benefits as outweighing the dangers. "There is a glaring contradiction in this society," says Mr Kammer. "We Germans like to see ourselves as Green, environment-friendly. But we are just not prepared to give up high speed. It's a taboo."

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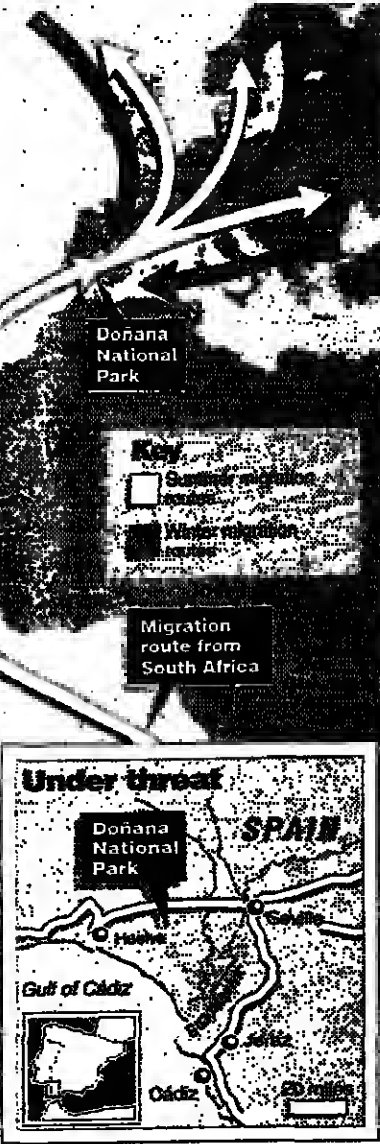
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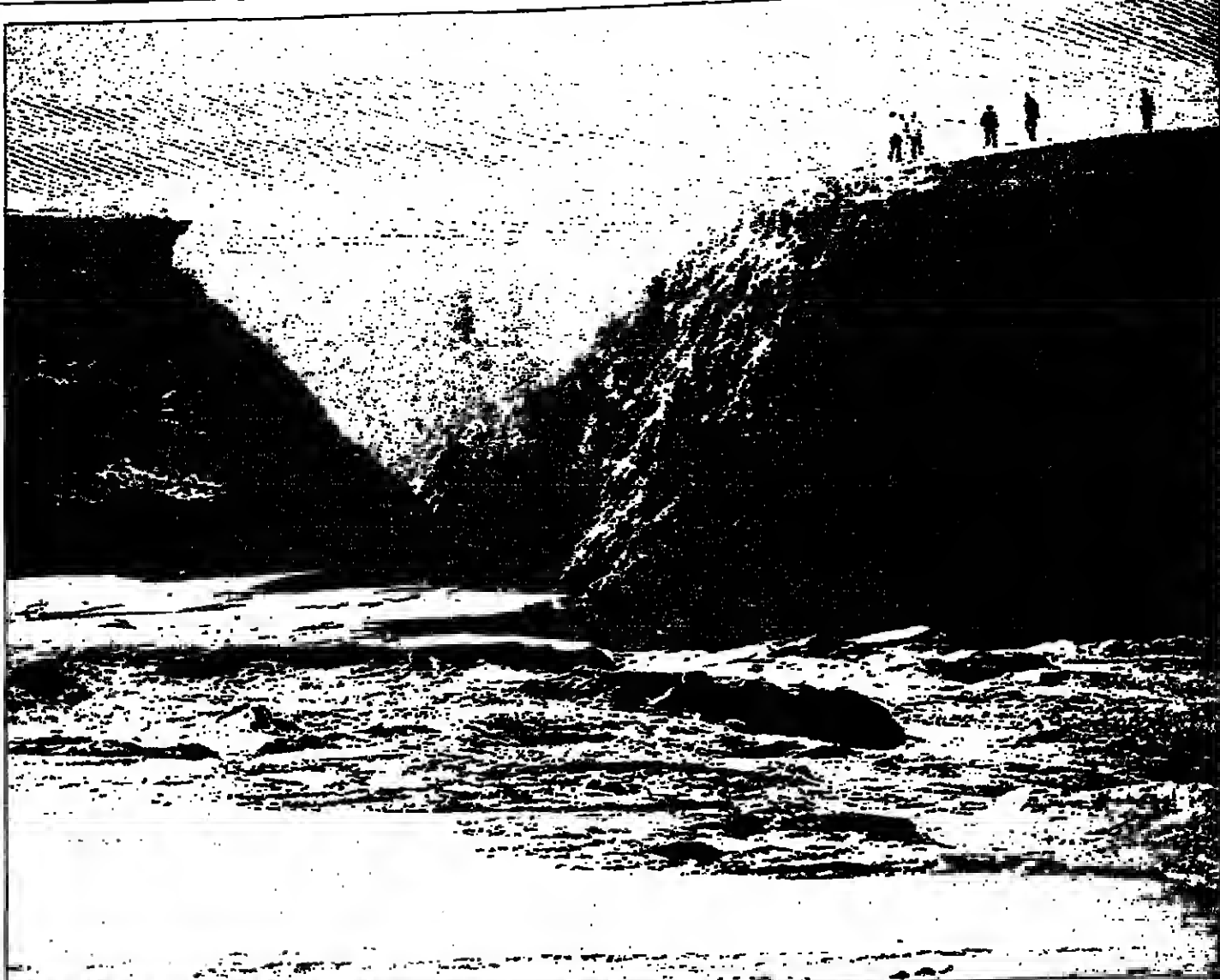
Crucial junction

The Doñana National Park in southern Spain is a major stopover for all manner of migrating birds. It acts as a vital resting place on the long haul from southern Africa for birds that fly on to Iceland, Scandinavia and eastern Europe. It also provides a refuge for birds that breed in northern Europe from the bitter cold of winter.



After nearly 160,000 tonnes of heavy-metal sludge went oozing down Andalusia's Guadalquivir river towards Doñana National Park, officials of a Swedish-Canadian mining company (right) survey the source of the spill — the waste reservoir near Seville. The park forms the main resting place for birds migrating between Europe and Africa.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EDUARDO ABAD



Poison timebomb may destroy birds' key haven

John Hooper in Seville reports on fears for a vital Andalusian migration area as toxic sludge seeps in

A SPILLAGE of toxic waste in one of the most environmentally sensitive areas on earth is threatening the wildlife of two continents. The affected area is the Doñana National Park in Las Marismas, the Andalusian marshlands between Seville and the sea.

The Doñana is more than an exceptional wildlife preserve, a key wintering location for the wild fowl of northern Europe and one of the last refuges of the Iberian lynx

and the Iberian imperial eagle: for the park and its surroundings also form the main resting place for birds migrating between Europe and Africa.

Disaster struck in the early hours of April 25 when the retaining wall of a waste reservoir collapsed at a Swedish-Canadian mining plant north-west of Seville. Some 158,000 tonnes of waste containing heavy metals and other toxic material were sent oozing down the River Guadalquivir towards the park.

But the event vanished from the headlines, largely because the lethal grey sludge was, for the most part, blocked before reaching the heart of the Doñana. Only 3 per cent of the surface of the national park was covered. But gradually the effects of the disaster are seeping into every aspect of life in Andalusia.

Some effects are relatively small. For example, pilgrims travelling south from Seville in traditional covered wagons drawn by oxen or on horseback for last weekend's annual festival in honour of the Virgin Mary as Reina de las Marismas (Queen of the Marshes) were warned not to take their usual route across the Guadalquivir to the town of El Rocío. Instead they had to use the main road to avoid

the thick layer of intensely toxic waste which still coats the banks of the river.

The official body co-ordinating the clean-up estimates that, at the present rate of slightly under 10,000 cubic metres a day, it can get the last waste taken off the surface by October 27.

But Britain's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds estimates it could take as much as 25 years for the area to recover. A Spanish scientist drawn by ozo or on horseback for last weekend's annual festival in honour of the Virgin Mary as Reina de las Marismas (Queen of the Marshes) were warned not to take their usual route across the Guadalquivir to the town of El Rocío. Instead they had to use the main road to avoid

The weight of the toxic material which cascaded out of the Boliden Apirsa plant at Aznalcózar was almost four times as great as that released in the Exxon Valdez tanker disaster of 1989.

Some experts remain optimistic. José Antonín Valverde, the park's rurs director, believes "the chances of a wide-ranging disaster are minimal, if everything proceeds as it has done".

But such views are now in a minority. Spain's notoriously divided environmental pressure groups have joined in a declaration that the situation is much worse than claimed by the regional and national authorities because of the peculiar nature of the crisis, which is brimful of the potential for delayed effects.

"Heavy metals have a feature which is not noticeable at first," says Carlos Vallejo, a biologist with the Asociación para la Defensa de la Naturaleza (ADENA). "They get into the body and act like hormones, causing problems

of infertility, growth, sexual and neurological maturity, and even suppressing the immune system. They can also cause certain cancers."

The animals that died at the poisonous, acid tide swept down the Guadalquivir are likely to make up no more than a fraction of the eventual total. For the toxins have only started to pass up the food chain. The birds that come to the area to live off its abundant fish and shellfish are particularly at risk.

Park records show several species, such as the gull-billed tern and the black-necked grebe, go exclusively or primarily to the very area, just outside the park, where the toxic waste has banked up most thickly. An aerial count two years ago found 54 per cent of the cormorants and

46 per cent of the flamingos in the same area.

"Many birds had just the park to spend the spring and summer in northern Europe when the spill took place. But, starting probably with the grey heron, they will begin returning in August. And even the authorities are expecting the mud to have been removed by then."

In the meantime, the metals in the mud — zinc, lead, copper and silver — will be seeping into the soil, creating a hidden peril for humans. According to Spain's Young Farmers' Association, some 1,400 acres of land which has not been covered in waste is irrigated by systems that draw water from wells feared to have been polluted.

The rate of seepage will depend largely on rainfall in the

area over the coming five months. It is usually dry from June to September, but the norm is for rain to fall again in October.

What would turn the disaster into a catastrophe would be if the heavy metals in the waste were to penetrate the aquifer under the park. Aquifer 27, as it is called, is the Doñana's invisible secret. Up to 700ft deep, it covers some 2,000 square miles stretching from the Rio Tinto to the Rio Guadalquivir.

Initial tests suggest the toxins have not penetrated it. But nobody can be certain. As the head of Spain's Science Research Council, César Nombela, remarked: "The fact that the first analyses indicate that the aquifer has not been polluted does not mean that one day it will not be."

Nuclear club tells India and Pakistan to talk

Ian Black in Geneva

INDIA and Pakistan were urged last night to sign up to the nuclear test ban treaty and make no move to turn their nuclear devices into weapons.

The call came from the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council — all of them nuclear powers — which offered help to stabilise Indo-Pakistani relations.

Madeline Albright, the US secretary of state, and Rohin Cook, Britain's Foreign Secretary, joined their counterparts from Russia, China and France in emergency session in Geneva to urge the South Asian rivals to cool off and start talking.

"Both Indians and Pakistanis are far less secure than they were three weeks ago," Mrs Albright warned. "Right now the most important thing both need to do is take a deep breath and begin to dig themselves out of the hole they have dug themselves into."

Mr Cook said: "We regard this situation as very grave indeed. We are not going to forget about this issue. We want to see the non-proliferation regime strengthened or weakened."

Despite the severe tension created by the two sets of tests last month and the fear that other countries could follow suit, the big five gave no collective commitment to new moves on disarmament.

And they resisted any notion of giving India or Pakistan formal status as nuclear weapon states as this would destroy the non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) — the world's most important arms control pact — and raise similar

questions about the status of Israel.

"Notwithstanding their recent tests, India and Pakistan do not have the status of nuclear powers in accordance with the NPT," last night's communiqué insisted.

Pakistan says it carried out six nuclear tests last week in response to five by India on May 11 and 13. The two countries have fought three wars since 1947. Both have refused to sign the NPT because it divides the world into nuclear haves and have-nots. On Kashmir, the Muslim-majority Indian state which Pakistan claims, the main source of tension between the two countries.

'While it might be sublime to have giant strength, it is a giant mistake to manifest it. This was one genie better confined in the bottle.'

curity Council powers urged the two sides "to find mutually acceptable solutions through direct dialogue that address the root causes of the tension... and to try to build confidence rather than seek confrontation."

British officials said ideas included prior notification of any military exercises and the establishment of a working hotline — both devices used effectively to reduce East-West tensions during the cold war.

Last night's demand is for

an unconditional signature by both sides on the comprehensive test ban treaty, no transfer of technology to other states, and talks on reducing stockpiles of fissile material.

Earlier, the Iranian foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, whose country denies accusations it is secretly building a bomb said: "While it might be sublime to have giant strength, it is a giant mistake to manifest it. This was one genie that was much better confined in the bottle."

Many experts believe that one likely outcome of the Asian crisis will be new confidence-building measures amongst the nuclear weapons states, although the US is arguing that the ratification of the START II treaty by the Russian duma parliament needs to come first.

"It is beginning to filter through to some of the policy makers that nuclear disarmament has to be taken more seriously," said one analyst. "But so far the permanent five have not come to terms with the fact that there has been a seismic shift because of the Indian and Pakistani tests. They haven't grasped that we're on the threshold of non-proliferation through disarmament or the erosion of non-proliferation through nuclear freefall."

India, Pakistan and the official nuclear five could come under new pressure next week when the G8 group of leading industrial countries meet in London. Canada is expected to play a key role in persuading Delhi and Islamabad to de-escalate — and perhaps more quietly, the P5 to work harder to convince the rest of the world of the sincerity about disarmament.

Australia's Howard scorns 'deranged' rightwing MP

Christopher Zinn in Brisbane

THE Australian prime minister last night launched an unprecedented attack on the controversial anti-immigration MP Pauline Hanson, calling her "deranged", after she accused Aboriginals of plotting to use taxpayers' funds to set up their own state.

John Howard broke his longstanding policy of ignoring the leader of the One Nation Party just as its rising popularity in Queensland threatens to give it the balance of power in next week's knife-edge state election.

Tourism losses are concerned about damage to links with Asia if the xenophobic party wins even two or three seats.

In a speech in Canberra, Ms Hanson claimed a United Nations draft treaty would help help Aboriginals, who represent 2 per cent of the population, set up a separate black homeland. She said Aboriginals were more interested in "remuneration than reconciliation".

But Mr Howard's coalition government has been accused of hypocrisy, especially by ethnic groups. In Australia's preferential voting system, Queensland's ruling coalition has placed One Nation above Labour on their cards telling the electorate how to vote. Mr Howard has described the move as purely tactical. But yesterday representatives of 45 Asian community organisations asked him to change the policy and put One Nation



Pauline Hanson kisses a supporter at a One Nation rally. Yesterday the prime minister lambasted her 'inaccurate, dishonest' attack on Aboriginals. PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLIAM WEST

ing a power base.

The treasurer, Peter Costello, said she was wrong on every economic issue she had ever addressed and was being directed by right-wing extremists. "One Nation is a lot of shadowy people who choreograph Pauline Hanson for their own ends, which are very unsavoury."

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Marijuana substitute combats nerve gas

Julian Borger in Jerusalem

THE best available protection against nerve gas attack comes from an Israeli-made synthetic equivalent of marijuana, US military experiments have shown.

In US army tests, rats injected with Dexanabinol, a chemical substitute for hashish, were more than 70 per cent less likely to suffer epileptic seizures or brain damage after exposure to sarin and other nerve gases, according to results published in the Israeli press yesterday.

The drug was developed by an Israeli pharmaceutical firm, Pharmos, to treat head injuries and strokes, but it now looks likely to become part of the standard chemical warfare kit carried by Nato troops after the results of the tests were announced at a conference last month.

Dr Anat Blagon, the deputy director-general for research at Pharmos, told the Ha'aretz newspaper: "Dexanabinol can be used as part of the standard treatment in an attack using nerve gas, along with atropine. The drug can diminish damage of the kind we saw in Gulf war syndrome."

It is thought to interact with neural receptors in the brain in the same way as marijuana, and thereby block the damaging effects of nerve agents. The US tests suggest it is effective as an antidote and as a preventive measure. So far, tests have only been carried out on rodents, but experiments on humans are expected to be the next stage.

Until then, no one can be sure whether Dexanabinol has the same mellowing side-effects as organic marijuana.

Syria's ruler sets free 200 political prisoners

David Hirst in Cairo

THE SYRIAN government has released more than 200 political prisoners in the past few days, it was reported in Beirut and Damascus yesterday.

The mass release, the largest for two years, is another landmark in what seems to be a policy of gradually freeing long-standing political opponents of President Assad's regime. A further 500 are believed still to be in prison.

The freed detainees — 225 according to the Beirut newspaper al-Nahar — cover the whole political spectrum from members of the Muslim Brotherhood to communists. They include members of a leftwing faction of the Syrian Ba'ath Party, led by the late General Salah Jadid, whose overthrow in 1970 marked the beginning of Mr Assad's 28 years as sole master of Syria. Among those freed was Riad Turk, secretary-general of the anti-government branch of the Syrian communist party.

Also released was Akhram Nuaisseh, spokesman for the Committee for Defence of Democratic Liberties in Syria and vice-president of the Arab Human Rights Commission.

A President Assad's standing has risen substantially in the Arab world for his refusal to join in the Middle East peace process with Israel. This approval has apparently encouraged him to soften some of the harsher features of a still very authoritarian regime. He has also shown interest in improving his reputation outside the region. The latest releases coincide with Syria's participation in this week's European-Mediterranean conference in Palermo.

Hong Kong punctures China's amnesia over Tiananmen massacre

Andrew Higgins in Hong Kong

QUEEN Victoria kept her back turned, raindrops dribbling from her chin, as Hong Kong confronted its new masters in Beijing last night with an emotional candlelit vigil in memory of the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

Underlined by a torrential downpour and last year's change of sovereignty, tens of thousands of people gathered under umbrellas to mark the ninth anniversary of the blood-

shed — and enter history as the first protesters permitted to mourn the trauma of Tiananmen on Chinese soil.

"China has to remain silent. But we, too, are now part of China. We have to make our voices heard," said Lee Cheuk-yan, a trade unionist and legislator active in a Hong Kong organisation that supported the Tiananmen students in 1989 and has worked to keep their cause alive.

In Victoria Park, still adorned with the British queen's statue, the crowd sang in praise of a democracy movement extinguished by the

People's Liberation Army. The same force took command of Hong Kong's Prince of Wales barracks on July 1 last year but has avoided displaying its power, even keeping the name of the headquarters.

Hong Kong officials stayed away from the commemorative Pillar of Shame — a plywood model of a Tiananmen memorial used by students as their command post in 1989. But they hailed the event as proof of the success of "one country, two systems", the formula under which Britain handed back its last big colony.

"Provided they act within the law, people are free to express their views on any issue under the sun," said Simon Chan, the territory's number two official.

From a stage erected next to a basketball court hung a large black banner: "Reverse the Verdict on June 4." Other banners vowed to "fight to the end" and "never forget June 4".

Large loudspeakers broadcast at a deafening volume words that can barely be whispered in Beijing, where all public discussion of the events of 1989 is taboo. The Communist Party defines the 1989 student move-

ment as a "counter-revolutionary rebellion".

Speakers included Szeto Wah, a former Hong Kong school teacher and democracy leader condemned by Beijing as a "subversive", and China's two best-known dissidents, now in exile in the United States and barred from returning.

Wei Jingsheng, a key figure in the 1979 Democracy Wall movement, sent a pre-recorded video message. Wang Dan, a leader of the 1989 protesters, spoke live from New York.

Hong Kong has held demonstrations every year since 1989, when more than a million took

to the streets to condemn the Chinese army's assault on unarmed protesters. But last night's protest was the first such gathering on Chinese soil. Organisers put the crowd at 40,000, though this seems an over-estimate.

"They are making history here today," said Robin Munro, the Hong Kong director of Human Rights Watch. "This is the first time inside the People's Republic of China that so many people have insisted on sticking to their own version of history, to their own ideas, to their own anger and to their own sorrow."



One of thousands at a candle-lit vigil in Hong Kong's Victoria Park last night, defying rain. PHOTOGRAPH BY [unclear]

صلى الله عليه وسلم

Analysis World Cup security

The police have been putting as much effort into preparing for France '98 as the competing teams. Their goal is to prevent trouble, but whether they will attain it is as uncertain as predicting which country will win the cup. **John Duncan** reports

The hooligans' fear of the penalty

WHEN the first ball is kicked for France '98, Eddie Curtis's tournament will not yet have started. As the man charged with intelligence liaison between British and French police during the World Cup, his thoughts will be several hundred kilometres away in Marseille where the first trickle of supporters will be arriving for the match against Tunisia.

Curtis, his boss Tim Hollis, and the Football Intelligence Unit of the National Criminal Intelligence Service have been preparing for that day for the past two years, since Euro 96 passed off relatively peacefully. From that moment it was clear that if England qualified for France 98 the tournament would be a turning point, either the welcome death knell for England's reputation as the capital of football huggery, or the last violent hurrah for the minority of yobs whose ugly roar has followed the three lions around the world.

Football violence is nothing new. It has been around since the last century, though on an international level England became a focus for hooligans in the late 70s and 80s with the sight of tear-gas drifting across the field in the 1980 European Championships in Italy and the players forced to retire from the field an enduring image.

Concern about the impact of hooligans during World Cup is nothing new either. The Sun in 1986 just before the

finals in England commented that "It may only be a handful of hooligans involved... but if this sort of behaviour is repeated in July the world will conclude that all the British are hooligans." (4)

The question now is will they conclude that in July 1998?

Few in the football intelligence community will commit themselves publicly on the subject, all talk of the dangers of complacency of the unpredictable nature of hooliganism, of their fears about ticketless fans, giant screens, the return of some previously dormant yobs on the scene, of French strategy. But beneath the warnings there is a sense that everything that could have been done has been. "We and the French have learned from the lessons in the past," said one senior police officer. "The key to our strategy has been co-operation, the sharing of expertise and information and we have been very encouraged by the willingness of the French to listen to our experience and to use the information we can give them. They saw what happened in Italy last year (when England played Italy) and have been very encouraging and advice was ignored."

Senior French police officers visited Blackburn and Nottingham three months ago to see British police in action. By then they were already familiar with the modus operandi of British anti-hooliganism, good intelligence, good surveillance and a flexible, appropriate graded response to trouble as it

arises. The French have adapted well. Their initial plan was to have no police officers in the stadiums keeping them on stand-by outside; allowing stewards to deal with problems in the stands. "That concerned us because you have no flexibility of response," said one senior intelligence officer. "If an incident happens you have the CRS come in in riot gear, typed-up and untrained to the atmosphere in the ground, it can escalate the problems rather than solve them." The French took the hint and will model their entire stadium policing on the Euro 96 model.

SECURITY in France is the most extensive yet. A team of British "hooligan spotters" will work at ports and city centres with French police to look out for known troublemakers and identify them to the French. The spotters know the hooligan and they know him and he will often identify himself, a civil tap on the shoulder, a little nudge and greeting in a bar or on a train and the yobs know they have been rumoured.

The police divide football hooligans into three categories. Category C are the hard-core hooligans, the "generals of hate" of popular mythology, organised in search of trouble, setting it up wherever they can. There are about 200 of them on the FTU computer. Category B are their footsoldiers, occasionally part of club-based gangs in England, up for a scrap if it

happens, but not organising anything themselves. There are as many as 1,000 names on file at NCIS. British police aim to help the French keep tabs on the Cat C hooligans and control the Cat Bs well enough to stop them gathering and reaching a potentially violent critical mass.

However there is one unknown quantity in France 98. In previous World Cups England have been based in one city for the first two weeks of the tournament: Cagliari in 1990, Bilbao in 1982. That had some positive effects — England stayed where they were and other fans only came in on the day of the game. But it had some negative impact, too — bored fans with nothing to do but drink, living and sleeping as cheaply and roughly as possible were fertile conditions for xenophobia. The local population and the Brits had plenty of time to fall out with each other.

This time, however, England will play in three venues: Marseille, Toulouse and Lens. There will be seven days between the first and second games, and four before the third. The small distances involved suggests many fans will come in and out on the days of games. Lens, for example, where the third match

takes place is no harder to get to than Newcastle. Some say less bored fans in situ means less chance for bad feelings to develop, and more manageable policing. Others argue that it removes some inhibition. "There was a controlling influence of being in one place," says John Williams of the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research. "No one wants to get chucked out on the first day so there was a limited incentive to get involved in trouble early on. The danger now is that if people are going over for one game they have to cram everything in — all their drinking, all their enjoyment — and some people will take that too far."

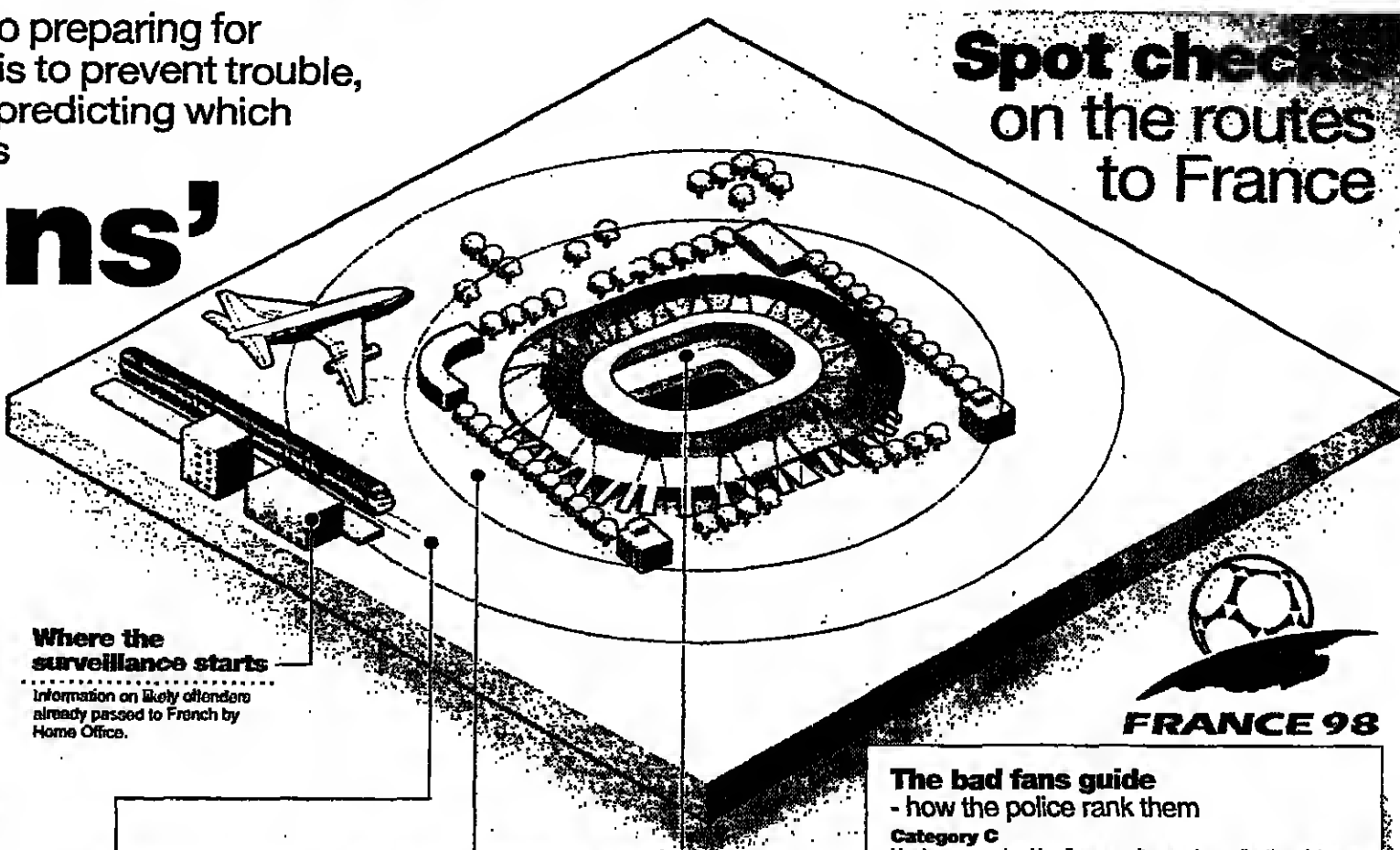
There are fears also that the criss-crossing of supporters over the country will provide ample opportunities for spontaneous violence among fans with regional grudges (Germany, England, Holland and Croatia are usually mentioned in this regard).

The highest positive, though according to Williams, who has observed hooligans since the early 1980s, is that the composition of England fans this time will be different. "Even last year in Italy there were signs of a shift in the make-up of England's support, more cosmopolitan,"



Decca Aitkenhead: Down with the English

Spot check on the routes to France



Where the surveillance starts
Information on likely offenders already passed to French by Home Office.

On the way and on the Continent

The National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) will monitor airports, channel tunnel and ferry ports to spot trouble-makers travelling to the continent.

Pre-match nerves outside the stadium

- Gendarmes check bars and pubs
- Police check spectators have tickets
- Tickets checked for validity
- Spectators directed to correct entrance
- Body searches by police

Fever Pitch inside the stadium

- Stewards ensure spectators heading for correct block of seats
- Spotters from the Association of Chief Police Officers, known to hooligans, present in the crowd to deter violence
- Hooligans will quickly be extracted from the maelstrom by police
- Arrests will be processed in France
- Magistrates on hand to deal with offenders
- Court cases will be dealt with within a minimum of 48 hours. Prison sentences for the most serious offences

No-go

- Convicted English and Welsh trouble-makers must report to a police station during their nations' games
- 65 fans under restraining orders; only 2 have been broken
- French authorities can request that individuals convicted during World Cup be prevented from travelling to international games in the future

The bad fans guide - how the police rank them

Category C
Hardcore organised hooligans, inciting and coordinating violence between organised rival blocks of fans. About 200 registered with the NCIS

Category B
Some 1,000 "rank and file" supporters who may become involved in trouble if the opportunity presents itself. Incidents are often alcohol-related

Category A
Law abiding fans who do not present any threat. These constitute the majority of spectators

Red card

- Affray
- Breach of exclusion order
- Disorderly/threatening behaviour
- Drunk-related offences
- Loitering offences
- Ticket touting

Flashpoints

- Drunkenness
- Singing of national anthems
- Dirty chanting
- Racist abuse
- Goals, tools and the rest
- Defeat or victory

Syria's ruler sets free 200 political prisoners

David Hirst in Cairo

THE SYRIAN president Hafez Assad has ordered the release of 200 political prisoners, a move seen as a sign of liberalisation. The prisoners, who had been held for years, were released on the condition that they would not engage in political activities. The move was widely welcomed by human rights groups and opposition figures.



Tear gas trouble in Italy... Atalanta v Juventus last month

PHOTO: VINCENZO LOMBARDI

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Diary

Matthew Norman

THE Diary prostrates itself before Andrew Mackinlay, Labour MP for Thurrock, who on Wednesday struck a blow for that quaint old notion that MPs are supposed to think for themselves. As Simon Hoggart admirably recorded in his sketch yesterday, the MP asked the Prime Minister if he recalled "how we used to groan at the fawning, obsequious, soft-ball, well-rehearsed, planted questions put by Conservative MPs to the former PM? Will you," he went on, "distinguish your period of office by discouraging such a practice?" Mr Tony, it appears, will not. Even so, in honour of this heroic backbencher, we make two announcements: firstly, June is Andrew Mackinlay month, and a new fact about him will be published every day; and secondly, a competition will be held throughout the summer to locate the most nauseatingly sycophantic Labour MP. The reader who alerts us to the eventual champion — with local newspaper cuttings, for instance, or by drawing attention to speeches in parliament or outside it — will receive a caricature (by a top cartoonist) of the MP in question in a position of stomach-churning horror with Mr Tony himself.

BY way of getting the ball rolling, I nominate as first candidate John Hutton, MP for Barrow. In Wednesday's PMQs, fate decreed that Mr Hutton should ask his question after Mr Mackinlay's... and in doing so he produced a classic piece of obsequiousness (one which including the phrase "Labour governments are always good news for the Health Service"). When we rang yesterday, Mr Hutton was in bullish mood. "Look," he said, "those who support the Government have as much right to express their opinion as those who don't. I make no apologies for my support." Further evidence of Mr Hutton's sycophancy will be gratefully received.

IAM intrigued by speculation following the abrupt departure of Paul McKinney, the former Gordon Brown researcher who lasted seven weeks as Labour's spin doctor in charge of Scotland. Could it be, we wonder, that Gordon may now seek to bring Joy Johnson, another former spin doctor, back into the fold as a spin consultant, with special responsibility for Scotland? Gordon may well harbour guilt over his failure to protect Joy, now a lecturer at Westminster University, from a marauding Mandy Mandelson when she was Labour's director of communications in 1995. How better to assuage that guilt and at the same time put Scotland — such a worry for Labour at the moment — in a safe and talented pair of hands?

AT the behest of keen Diary fan Stephen Jessel (many thanks for your encouraging e-mail), we have been in touch again with our friend at Number 10. Following Mr Blair's performance with Des O'Connor, in which he dropped his aitches, we hope to book him as a Pearly King in a charity parade we are thinking of holding in July. He will lead the parade. If all goes well, doing the Lambeth Walk with Barbara Windsor as his Pearly Queen. Alas, Downing Street gave us no time to explain this vote-winning idea, the press officer falling back on what has, this week, become a formula. "Are you from the Diary?" said the press officer. "Well, I'm afraid..."

ABIZARRE story, possibly apocryphal, reaches us about David Yelland, the surprise new editor of the Sun. Mr Yelland — a ringer for Les, the white-coated retard on Vic Reeves's Big Night Out — has lost all his hair through alopecia, and used to wear a luxuriant blond wig. One day he narrowly missed a tube train, it is told, but his wig did not. It departed the station without him, and at this moment Mr Yelland decided to go natural for good. Thus was his life changed forever. Mr Murdoch, after all, would not have given the Sun to a Michael Fabricant manqué. What an enchanting story. Good God, it could almost be the premise for a film.



I hope the English lose in the World Cup, because I don't like them

Decca Aitkenhead



WHEN the news broke that Gaza had been dropped from the World Cup squad, I had the good fortune to be visiting a city which wasn't fearing Hoddle had made the wrong decision, but, rather, was fervently praying he had. Glasgow was in high spirits last Sunday, enjoying an early rehearsal of the idea that will be Scotland's if England fall apart in France. In the happy event of English humiliation this summer, most of the world will join the Scots in jubilant celebration. And the English will scowl, and pout, and say, it's not fair why doesn't anybody like us? And then they'll look around for people to blame.

The English have been looking for someone to blame for their unlikability for a while now. It is increasingly said that they have an identity crisis, and that this is why they tend to behave in ways which make them so unattractive to everyone else. In Mindfield, a book of essays on race and culture published this week, a British National Party spokesman argues that white English men lack pride, and so misbehave, because we make insufficient fuss of their cultural heritage. If only we celebrated their traditions, as we do those of immigrant and Celtic communities! When prompted on what those traditions might be, he volunteers Morris dancing.

Speaking at a debate to launch the book, the Daily Mail journalist Ann Leslie offered the "non-racist" analysis, although it would have taken a highly perceptive member of the audience to tell the difference. Leslie says white boys who hang around in estates snarling at each other are victims of multiculturalism. There is far too much

emphasis on ethnic difference, she thinks, and well-meaning policies — letting Jewish kids off school for their holidays, say — have created resentment and tension among whites. The solution is to promote the distinctive cultural identity of those snarling white boys. Asked what that identity might be, she suggests their history of democracy.

Leaving aside the logical flaw in the argument — namely, that she is prescribing more of the very thing she says is the problem — the significant point is this: why do these theories always end up with Morris dancing and Big Ben? The answer is obvious to everyone lucky enough not to be English. It's not that Ann Leslie's snarling boys have got it wrong. England just doesn't have much of a distinctive, let alone likeable, cultural identity.

The one thing the English were traditionally good at was working hard and making money. The industrial revolution, the empire, the inventions — these were all exercises in making money, and with the protestant work ethic grinding everyone on, there was little time for anything else. There was certainly little time for learning how to have a good time — something which is evident from a night in any local town disco.

THE English clearly never had time to learn to dance, or enjoy music, or tell a good anecdote, or take pleasure in dressing up, and it shows. They wear clothes they are painfully unsure about, dance uneasily to music they don't know, and tell each other bad jokes they heard on Radio 1, in the absence of knowing how to have a conversation. English men

like wearing suits to social functions, not because they have nice suits, but because they would be in a panic about what else to wear.

English wedding guests like songs like The Time Warp and Whiffles because these tracks have set moves, relieving those on the dance floor from the alarming burden of thinking what to do with their feet. Rugby club players — those allegedly wild good-time boys — only abandon the prop of the bar and charge on to the dance floor when the Hawaii Five-O tune comes on, because they can pretend to row a canoe and call it dancing.

The English are like those over-serious freshers who spent too much of their teens studying for exams, and missed out on learning how to have fun. Now they're the ones nursing a spritzer at the back of the student bar, resenting the fact they don't know how to join in.

When people fret about an English identity crisis, what they actually mean of course is a working class identity crisis. The well-off middle classes are fine — they can still take a pride in their work and their wealth, and buy Italian opera and French chablis to make them feel like they've got culture. They may not be any more appealing than the rest, but they won't cause any bother either. It's the unemployed man on the council estate who everyone's really worried about. He's the one they're afraid might beat up a black kid, or disgrace his country in France.

If he's feeling culturally disenfranchised, it's hardly surprising. England gave him his cultural identity from his work — that's why he's still called working class — but if you take away the factories and the mines and the ship-

yards, you take away his culture, and Morris dancing or Big Ben are unlikely to function as successful substitutes. Even the man who still has a job has only a lame identity, if the job he's got is in the flexible time-sales unit of an out-of-town industrial estate.

In the absence of anything more colourful, though, the English working class did have class politics. Identity can come from all kinds of sources, and an understanding of class could be as affirming and enriching as any other. But England has declared class politics obsolete, a meaningless, once troublesome relic of its past, and you will go a long way these days to hear anyone talking about class identity. Tony Blair will regard this as one of his more ingenious achievements. He has presumably not yet appreciated the cost.

IF Englishness means anything, it is probably a sensibility — a tendency to irony, scepticism, irreverence. But you can't cook a national dish of irony or organise an annual carnival of scepticism. Those on the right who worry about English identity should look to their own centuries in power for explanations of the crisis. It is certainly not the fault of the Scots, Irish, Welsh or ethnic communities, whose vibrance can't be blamed for the misfortune of the English. If the English are so unhappy with themselves that they behave like monsters when their football team loses, you can hardly blame everyone else if — and hopefully, when — come July, we are celebrating the misfortune of England.

Mindfield: The Race Issue. Ed Susan Greenberg (Camden Press)

Broadway's queer panic

Bill Buford



THE Manhattan Theatre Club, an off-Broadway "non-profit" repertory company, got itself into a bit of trouble last month, and the trouble tells us something about how Americans approach the high-minded business of high culture.

The theatre was started in 1923 by a PR executive who had grown bored with the toothless populist pap he was seeing on Broadway and dedicated itself to producing challenging, serious work often by unknown playwrights. The counterpart in London might be something like the Almeida, although the Manhattan Theatre Club is considerably more ambitious. It has three venues, and has mounted Broadway productions and films. It is an operation with a budget — spending nearly £10 million a year — and this autumn it was scheduled to produce Corpus Christi, a new play by Terrence McNally. McNally is one of the theatre's home-grown successes.

What is publicly known about the play is in an article that appeared about a month ago on page 5 in the New York Post after a reading was conducted among potential cast members. The play, the article tells us, is about "a Christ-like character" — the "king of the queers", according to Pontius Pilate — "who has sex with his apostles."

The next day, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights sent out letters to "141 political leaders", demanding that funding of the theatre be stopped. Then, a corporate sponsor, TWA, withdrew the money it had donated to meet the production costs.

SHORTLY thereafter, several messages were left on the box-office answer machine. A selection was played at a press conference last week. This is one: "This message is again for Jew guilty homosexual Terrence McNally. Because of you we will exterminate every member of the theatre and turn the place to the ground. This is a message from the National Security Movement of America. Death to the Jews worldwide." It's creepy stuff, and I'd hate to have been the first one in the office the next morning.

The play, I've since been able to learn, is pretty strong. It tells the story of Jesus, but set in Texas, and opens in a seamy, sweaty Tex-Mex dive, with a woman in the next room screaming "Fuck me, fuck me", over and over again (Joseph, we learn, got his balls shot off in the Guadalupe — thus Mary's virginity).

There is a circumcision, with lots of cartoon blood ejaculating all over everybody, and a theme in big dick, wee dick jokes. In the next scene, Joshua, a student of Pontius Pilate High School, disapproves his girlfriend on prom night — he can't get an erection — and later comes to recognise his sexuality in the early hours with Jesus. The rest is anachronistic and largely slapstick. The magic, curing touch of Christ is a hand job; the last supper is a food fight. When Joshua reveals that one of his disciples will betray him — someone who "has laid with him" — they all break out into campy, raucous declarations, revealing, well, that it could be anyone of them, really. And the point? That Jesus is for all people. Of course.

Is it good? It's impossible to tell. The script is being revised, and the humour will be in the staging. But its wit rests on its deliberately offensive, knowing, re-interpretation of the scripture. And that will come to be seen as clever, maybe, or just plain silly. The plot summary I offer has not, by the way, been published in America. The Manhattan Theatre Company is reluctant to share a script that is more flagrantly blasphemous than anyone has yet realised. And, recognising that, the theatre panicked, and about two weeks ago cancelled the production, citing its fear for the safety of its staff.

Is a phone message reason enough to cancel a production? The panic reveals a curious feature, of non-profit art organisations in America. The non-profit status, which is not easy to come by, has its benefits which no one in Britain enjoys, although there has been talk of emulating it. In practice, affluent do-gooders tend to support an art that

It seems there's a Christ-like character who has sex with his apostles

makes them feel good. For me to call it high-minded toothless pap is bit harsh. But you get the idea.

And history hasn't been kind to the early revolutionaries of free expression. Maurice Girodias of the Olympia Press standing up for Lolita or Henry Miller, the Barney Rossetts, the John Calders. So many ended up not quite sorting out their business; they weren't winners.

And one is a time of winners. But the Manhattan Theatre Club is old-fashioned in this one respect: its success is based on what its writers have done, not its affluent patrons. And the writers walked out. Athol Fugard withdrew his next play — it was already in rehearsal — and was joined in his protest by the likes of Arthur Miller.

And last week, the Manhattan Theatre Club remembered its role and changed its mind. The play will now be staged in September. It is going to be a lively, arty autumn after all.

Clinton is unsuccessful in his foreign policy as conflicts rage around the world

Failing fireman

Jonathan Eyal

THE FIVE permanent members of the UN Security Council met yesterday in Geneva in order to devise a new response to the nuclear challenge posed by India and Pakistan. Yet no amount of ringing declarations from Geneva can hide a simple fact: the policy which the United States sought to pursue since the end of the cold war has now been torn apart.

Asia now resembles Europe at the beginning of the century. It has countries which are experiencing a gradual decline, and states which are determined to translate their economic growth into military might. It is riddled with territorial disputes and, like in Europe a century ago, the absence of serious regional co-opera-

tion structures has led to a furious arms race and a growing competition for spheres of influence. Averting these developments was one of President Clinton's chief foreign policy priorities, and it has ended in failure. Nor is the failure confined to Asia alone. The Palestinian-Israeli peace process is defunct, the dual policy of containing both Iraq and Iran at the same time cannot be sustained beyond this year, while stability in Russia — another Clinton objective — is now seriously threatened. In Kosovo, the Americans are pursuing unsuccessful policies designed to prevent violence but maintain Serb control. In Africa, conflicts continue to rage. Washington cannot be held accountable for these developments. But the country which, as late as 1991, was proclaiming a new "world order" in which American

values of free markets, human rights and collective economic security triumphed, is now faced with a multi-polar world in which its overwhelming military superiority is of little use and its domination increasingly challenged.

The essence of US policy

Asia now resembles Europe at the beginning of the century

was to retain maximum American influence, while reducing the costs of this foreign policy. It was a simple concept, and it simply failed.

The roots of the failure lie in the fact that the US itself never pursued its

regional co-operation efforts with conviction. Americans encouraged Asia to develop security structures. But they also operated a separate policy towards Korea and China, and upgraded their bilateral military relationship with Japan. Washington promoted the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to the countries of Central Europe. But they also retained their separate policy towards Russia and were keen to maintain their special relationship with both Germany and Britain.

In Latin America, Clinton offered free trade. But he also enticed Argentina with the status of a "strategic ally", while dangling to Brazil an offer of a possible membership in the UN Security Council. The often contradictory nature of this policy bred confusion

and resentment. India's main reason for its nuclear tests is to acquire regional superpower status on its own terms, rather than on the basis of those dictated by Washington.

Yet, even if Clinton pursued a better strategy, the

American political system was never designed to sustain a coherent foreign policy. The country spends a mere 1 per cent of its budget on foreign aid, with only a tiny amount allocated to Africa, and even this is now conditioned on

ridiculous anti-abortion policies. The Republican-dominated Congress is still reluctant to increase support for the International Monetary Fund or eliminate the debt which the US owes to the United Nations. And major international issues are hijacked by various ethnic lobbies on Capitol Hill.

One way or another, the US will have to adapt to a world in which it will still have a very important voice, but one in which its influence will always have to be shared with regional powers, some of them with nuclear weapons. Foreign policy specialists in Washington may regard this a natural development. But for Congress and the military, the new realities come as a rude awakening.

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Wrong to raise rates

Industry needs succour

THE BANK OF ENGLAND was wrong to raise interest rates yesterday by another 0.25 per cent to 7.5 per cent. This is the sixth interest rate rise since Labour came to power and the fifth since the Bank of England was granted independence. The Bank's monetary policy committee knows that by raising rates yet again it will make sterling stronger just when it was starting to show signs of subsiding from the crazy heights of the past year, which have plunged manufacturing industry towards a premature and unnecessary recession. A Washington think-tank said earlier this week that the pound was already overvalued by 20 per cent. The rationale behind yesterday's move is that by raising interest rates now, the subsequent effect on the economy will be much less serious than if it is left until later next year. But how do they know?

The only thing certain at the moment is that while arguments about raising interest rates are hotly disputed, manufacturing industry is on its knees. By constantly making manufacturing the fall guy, this Government (and, of course the previous one, which created most of the problem in the first place) have made a strong pound so much the norm that only very optimistic companies are prepared to lay down new investment for the export market. The constant squeeze on manufacturing also makes it very difficult for industry in Britain to achieve the sort of virtual spiral which appears to be happening in the US.

where higher wages are absorbed by higher productivity, leading over time to lower prices and then lower wages.

The Bank (and the Chancellor) have been very worried about the rise in average earnings in the private sector but the 4.9 per cent increase in the latest 12 months was inflated by high bonuses (and may be distorted by special factors for a few months more). The time lag for earnings to respond to high interest rates may simply be taking longer than usual (mirroring the exceptionally long time it took before exports dropped in the face of the strong pound). The actual level of pay settlements (ie before overtime and bonuses are added on) has actually moved slightly downwards. Settlements were 3.6 per cent in December but were 3.5 per cent in March — which hardly seems a signal to press the panic button.

But, remember, high earnings are a good thing in themselves. They only become bad when they lead to higher prices. At the moment the underlying inflation rate is 3 per cent or 0.5 per cent above the target. The Bank has been set. But closer inspection shows that most of the recent inflation has been generated by government-induced measures in the budget (housing, motoring and tobacco) rather than in the high street. The prices of food and household goods are only 1 per cent above a year ago and clothing, footwear and leisure goods are down in price by up to 2 per cent. That's hardly the sign of a volcano exploding. The harmonised index of consumer prices (enabling international comparisons to be made under the terms of the Maastricht treaty) is rising at 1.9 per cent, the same as last November.

The important point about all this is that, although there are definite worries about wage inflation, there is no clear evidence

that the savage monetary squeeze already in the pipeline isn't more than enough to do the trick without risking the chance of a fresh recession through monetary overkill. Recent figures show a slowdown in the growth of retail sales and of the whole economy. Why suddenly act now? The Bank should have sat this one out. If yesterday's increase turns out to have been the final one in the old series, then it was risky and unnecessary. If it is the first in a new round of rate increases, then heaven help us.

Strategy wanted

Childcare needs action now

FOR four days Nick Davies's Guardian investigation into child sex abuse has set out a chilling catalogue of collusion, complacency and cover-up. Social service officials, local councillors and senior churchmen who should have been alerted by serious warning signs, opted to look the other way. Complaints were ignored. Children, to whom the child protection system is pledged to listen, were still frequently not heard. Worse still, Church and councillors who found abuse within their institutions, were still ready to carry out cover-ups.

The accused will say much of Nick Davies's evidence was historic, which is true. Almost all 17 police investigations into children's homes are historic — abuse which occurred over the last 30 years. The number of children in these homes has declined from 40,000 to 6,000 in this period. There are new helplines, independent visitors, mentors. But that is too complacent. Only six weeks ago the Chief Inspector of Social Services upbraided social service departments at a private conference. Ran-

dom inspections of a cross-section of authorities has found safeguards for children in care "at best patchy and in some places wholly unacceptable". Seven years on since the Warner committee reported, we still await a permanent monitoring group to improve protection in children's homes.

It's remit now, with the switch from institutional homes to individual foster parents, needs to be extended to fostering. Roger Saint, who was convicted last year of abusing nine children over a period of 10 years, will not be the last. It was right to move from institutional to family care, but foster families with fewer inspections and visitors make children more vulnerable. The insurance industry, fearful of large compensation claims, has forced authorities to withhold some reports. They must be challenged. It is bad enough robbing children of their childhood; denying them redress is almost as big a scandal.

Seven months ago Labour promised a national childcare strategy, but has still not produced one. A white paper is now promised for July. There is no shortage of proposals to improve child protection: Warner produced 80 and Uting another 20 last December. What we need is action.

Perils of speed

Is it worth the extra risk?

THE GERMAN InterCity disaster has much in common with the crash of an airliner: the method of travel is among the safest, but when something goes wrong, it is likely to have exceptionally horrific results. It also provokes — quite rightly — some very searching questions. On an actuarial basis, we might be entitled to let such infrequent catastrophes occur when

they will, and devote the time and money to reducing casualties on the roads. But the apprehension of danger is too disturbing, and the reality of catastrophe so shocking that we have to ask ourselves: could it happen here?

The answer is that it certainly could. The context in which high-speed trains operate in Germany and in Britain is very similar. In both countries, most existing track and its surroundings — particularly bridges and viaducts — have been improved and reinforced rather than purpose-built. The German InterCity Express can travel at up to 200 kilometres an hour on ordinary track: Wednesday's accident occurred at this upper limit. The British InterCity 125 can do the same — 125mph equals 200kph — though in practice it maintains a lower average speed. By the year 2005, a new generation of British trains will achieve much higher averages than the InterCity 125 on tracks where the main improvement is limited to better signalling.

The French TGV is arguably much safer, with bridges and underpasses designed to match the line — in the same way that in this country they are purpose built for motorways. This is not practical for most of the British rail network either on economic or environmental grounds: the Eurostar link — if it actually gets built — is the controversial exception. More modest measures could be taken: if road coaches now have safety-belts, why not high-speed trains? Yet even assuming Railtrack improves its safety and keeps its standards high, a catastrophe is always possible. It will only become less likely if we can change the culture of ever-increasing speed: trimming a few minutes off the journey time is simply not worth the extra risk. In the end, trains are not planes, and they should not pretend to be.

Letters to the Editor

Country life gets the bird

I WAS interested to learn that the Government is to spend \$88,500 on conserving the endangered bullfinch (Rescue plan drawn up for 'lost' wild life, June 3). No doubt this is a different department from the one that licensed farmers to kill bullfinches last year because there were so many they were destroying fruit crops. When will these different departments start talking to each other and stop destroying our wildlife?

Simon Green, Staplehurst, Kent.

YOU report the tragic death of a woman attacked by cows (June 2). Stuckler cows are dangerous. In this part of the Yorkshire Dales, a nearby farm has only two fields without public footpaths through them. On most weekends, hundreds of walkers go through the farmyard. Somehow the farmer must protect the animals from the people — and the people from the animals. So, like all farmers, our friend keeps paying his insurance.

Hilary Fenton, Settle, North Yorks.

EXPERIMENTS on the Tyne & Wear metro reveal that subjecting youths to soothing classical music reduces the incidence of vandalism. What social benefits are obtained when middle-aged Today programme listeners are subjected to the same treatment and who is collating the results?

Andy Dearden, University of York.

ON June 3, you carried a story on a house in Devon along with an article about a uranium mine in Dorset. Has the shaft at Dourney been checked for termites?

Paul McGhee, London.

No need for guilt, Jon

JON Snow is being self-indulgent regarding his mother's Alzheimer's (The brothers Snow fall out over mother, June 3). As a senior care assistant in an old people's nursing home, I know that the only place they will get properly treated is in a care home. It is a tough decision, but if you are thinking about the sufferer and not yourself and your own guilt, it is the only answer. Tom Snow is right.

But please visit them regularly and, however embarrassing you may find it, take them out to the local pub or in a wheelchair to the car. And no matter how deep their dementia reaches — continue to love them. Joe Phillips, Bingham, Notts.

YOUR article highlighted the psychological problems which families face when considering placing their parents/aunts etc in a home. I have been a manager of two nursing homes and have always discussed this problem with relatives. I point out that, yes, there will be a feeling of guilt, but they too have their lives to live. They have

families to look after, and careers. However, they need to continue to be involved with their relative, even though they may no longer be under their own roof.

Jon Snow and his family, and many others like them, have no need to feel guilty, as long as they do not abandon them and continue to be part of the caring team. Penelope Bennett, Bury St Edmunds.

JON Snow's brother is a lucky man. For many of us cannot reconcile knowledge and feelings that, in personal relationships, run on parallel tramlines and can never meet. I know it was impossible to keep my Alzheimer-suffering mother at home whilst looking after my stroke-ridden husband. I also know it was impossible to keep him at home for the last months of his life. Nevertheless I will go on feeling I should have done more for them until the day I die. Many people endure the same problem.

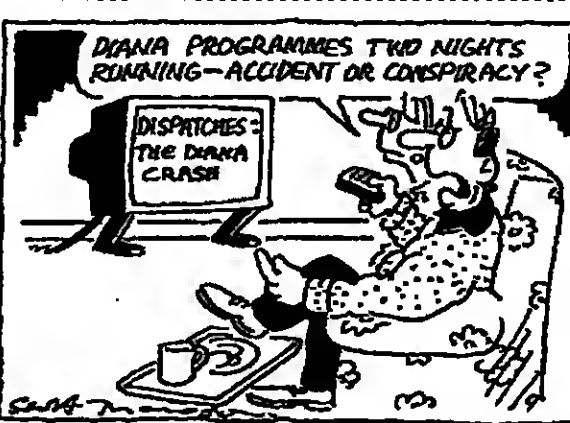
Tom Snow is fortunate not to suffer this distressing dichotomy that affects so many otherwise rational people. It is sad he has so little understanding and accep-

tance of how the other half think and feel. Diana Munday, St Albans, Herts.

LINDA Grant's experience of shopping with her mother is significant (These fragments I have shared against my ruins, Weekend, May 30). Her mother's pride in finding a perfect outfit surely shows that her personality is intact. Experienced practitioners of dementia care know that, despite all the disabilities the disease brings, the person is still there.

As Grant describes, in a family context loss of memories may be tragic. But for the individual who has dementia, memory loss in itself need not be such a big deal. If we can only confront our own fear and avoidance and see dementia as a disability like any other, we can help people with dementia function at a much higher level and greatly increase their well-being.

Although it still has a long way to go, this new positive approach is firmly advancing through the world of dementia care. See Benson, Professor of Social Work, Dementia Care, London.



A legal aid QC worth every penny

IDO hope criminal barristers' fees are looked at across the board and not only in the cases of appeals. My concern is that this attack on some barristers is more to do with them challenging the system on our behalf. Discrediting cases of miscarriages of justice, and those who fight to highlight the plight of these people will further deepen the mistrust ordinary people have for the judicial system.

In the case of Chris Sallou, as Philip English's stepmother, I have to declare an interest. He worked long and hard with Adrian Clarke,

Bindman & Partners, to correct a serious mistake made by the courts. He also gave every consideration to Philip family; direct access to him was available to family members for over a year. Philip English was 15 when he was wrongly convicted. He was facing the rest of his life in prison for a murder he did not commit. He now lives in his own flat, attends an outdoor education course and is in a steady relationship. Thanks to Chris Sallou, I say he was worth every penny. Mandy English, Stanley, Co Durham.

Privatised rail companies build up a head of steam

KEITH Harper takes a very one-sided view of the progress of the railways since privatisation (Of the rails, June 3). Let's look at a few facts. Investment in the railways would demand fare rises to reduce public borrowing. Train operators are committed to investing at least £1.95 billion in new equipment and services during their franchises, and Railtrack £17 billion over 10 years.

This summer's timetable has 50,000 more trains than last summer's — some 500 extra services a day. We are seeing unheard-of frequencies of service. Some services cut by InterCity, such as London Blackpool and London Shrewsbury, have been restored. Railway subsidies are being steadily cut and will fall by 55 per cent by 2002-03. According to the chief inspector of railways, safety has improved since privatisation. Rail use has surged by 7 per cent — twice the growth rate of the economy. These 47 million

extra journeys a year are in large part the result of innovative marketing and a fresh approach. Under BR, as soon as a line did well (the east coast line, for example) the Treasury would demand fare rises to reduce public borrowing.

Several fares, such as weekly season tickets, will be cut by 1 per cent a year in real terms for four years from 1999. Many rail travellers have never had such a guarantee of stable, let alone falling, fares. Not quite the picture of gloom painted by your article. James Gordon, Director general, Association of Train Operating Companies, London.

SOBA is to run Eurostar (Prescott saves Channel link, June 4)? Presumably we can now look forward to two-hour check-in times at Waterloo and over-booked tickets that don't guarantee a seat on a particular train. Adam Sowan, Reading.

How to heal the children in care

POLLY Toynbee strikes one false note in her otherwise excellent piece about government plans for children in care where she links the disappearance of small "family homes" to the "professionalisation of social work" (Children of despair, June 3). The reason for the breakdown of foster placements is the terrible intensity and complexity of emotional needs arising from damaging family experiences which children will bring into any substitute care setting. Week by week,

the qualified social workers I teach bring cases of this kind for discussion; often they feel professionally isolated because they are the only ones prepared to recognise the depth of the child's suffering and disturbance, and the long-term impact of this upon prospective careers.

The idea of "small family homes" creates a warm but illusory glow. Staff in such homes will need to be as highly trained and well-supported as anyone in the child care field, if this plan is to do

justice to the children involved, and lead to the better outcomes Polly Toynbee hopes for. Whether this means "professionalising" the carers I do not know, but in some countries, combining social exclusion requires a highly emotionally sophisticated workforce. This is one of them. Andrew Cooper, Professor of Social Work, The Tavistock Clinic.

We do not publish letters where only an e-mail address is supplied; please include a full postal address. We may edit letters. The Country Diary is on page 14.

Di theories

HOW rich of Francis Wheen (When's the World, 22, June 3) to accuse Mohamed Al Fayed of living in a fantasy world when — on the evidence of his column — he is clearly living next door. He alleges the makers of Diana's Secrets Behind The Crash allowed Mohamed Al Fayed to peddle his allegations that Diana and Dodi were murdered, possibly by the British security services. In return for a "peep" at Dodi Al Fayed's Paris apartment, there was no such deal and, as a matter of fact, he does

not make this allegation in the programme. Again, it is not certain that the driver was drunk, as Francis claims. If he had bothered to call me before writing his piece, the sort of exercise that he himself would call "proper, old-fashioned journalism", I could have explained to him why the blood test may not be reliable. Finally, I am amazed that he could compare two programmes, one of which he has not seen. Call me old-fashioned, but I would be reluctant to review a film I hadn't seen. Richard Beft, Producer, Diana's Secrets Behind The Crash.

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Ginger group

Bel Littlejohn

GET real, guys, in a vitally important week in world affairs, the media have been burying their heads in the shifting sands of trivia (memo to self: great phrase, keep in stock) and writing about footballers and pop stars.

It's left to those of us who actually care about what's happening in the real world to

stop all this chit-chat and start tackling the very serious issues facing this country today. A future for the National Health Service, for instance. Yesterday, I attended a top-level brainstorming session with Secretary of State for Health Frank Dobson, his number two, Paul Boateng, and Deputy Prime Minister Prescott. There's a serious crisis facing our health service in Britain today, and we were determined to address it.

"Frank," I began, "Sometimes I think our election promises on the whole health thing haven't lived up to their reputations. Perhaps we should seriously consider dropping some."

"Hmmm," said Frank, taking off his beard (few people realise it's detachable) and pondering my words. "You mean we should do a Glenn Hoddle on them?"

"You're right, Frank. He should never have got rid of Gascoigne. The guy's a genius," chipped in John Prescott, "He can literally transform a game in seconds."

"But I'm thinking in terms of health," I said, steering us back to the central issue. "Oh, health, health, health — don't talk to me about health!" argued Prescott, "Gazza may be a bit dodgy, but with a bit of hard training, he'd have been right back on form, no problem."

"It's Sheryl I feel sorry for," said Frank, fiddling and unfolding his beard on the beige table. "Lovely lady! Deep down, she's obviously the strong one in the relationship, wouldn't you agree, Bel?"

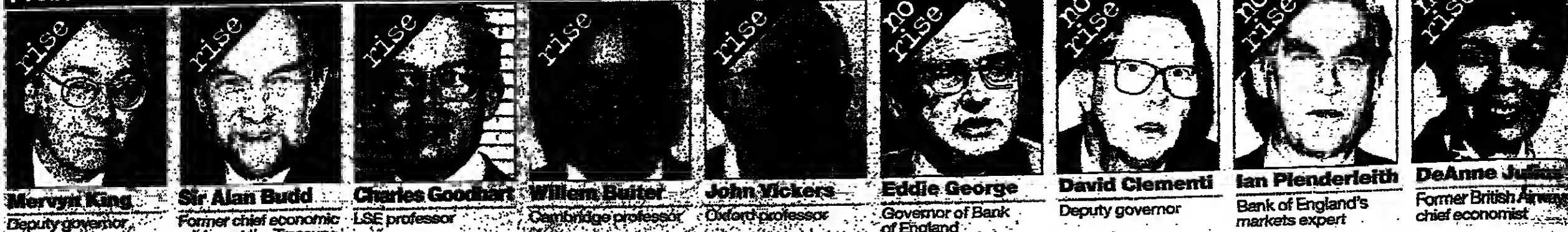
"I think we're getting diverted, Frank," I said, firmly. "Let's face it, we're talking broken promises here."

"Agreed!" said John Prescott. "So much for so-called Girl Power! First hint of a disagreement, and they're at each other like cats! I don't

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FinanceGuardian

Probable votes of Monetary Policy Committee



Academics triumph in interest rate battle

Mark Atkinson, Larry Elliott and Mark Milner

INFLATION-busting earnings in the private sector and a weaker pound swung a majority of the Bank of England's nine-strong monetary policy committee behind yesterday's surprise rise in interest rates. The voting record will not be made public for six weeks but the rate rise appears a victory for academics on the committee over "real worlders", including the governor, Eddie George.

Both the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, and the Bank's new deputy governor Mervyn King have been issuing tough warnings in recent months over the need for pay restraint. The rise in average earnings growth to 5 per cent, well above the 4.5 per cent limit seen as compatible with

an inflation target of 2.5 per cent, assuming productivity growth of 2 per cent, was seen as a portent of a renewed wage-price spiral. This fear was exacerbated by the fall in the international value of the pound to 3 per cent lower than the Bank expected when it drew its quarterly inflation report at the start of last month. Both factors were spelled out by the MPC in its explanation of yesterday's decision, which the City believes was made after a 5-4 vote.

For several months the MPC has been split between those pressing for a rate rise and those urging caution because of uncertainties in Asia and signs of a domestic slowdown. In February and March Mr George used his casting vote to resolve a 4-4 split in favour of no change in policy. But the arrival this week of John Vickers from Oxford

University to bring the committee up to its full strength of nine, and the return of the LSE's Charles Goodhart to the rate rise camp after a brief flirtation with the other group is thought to have shifted the balance of power. Leader of the "pointy-heads", as the City calls them, is Mervyn King, one of the Bank's two deputy governors, the intellectual powerhouse behind the Bank's quarterly inflation forecast. King joined the Bank from the LSE where he was a tax expert. Although he voted with the Governor at the start of the year, he has been pressing for higher interest rates ever since. Lining up beside him are Alan Budd, former chief economic adviser at the Treasury and ex-London Business School, William Butler, of Cambridge University, Goodhart and Vickers, the Bank's new chief economist.

Analysts say the academics have displayed a much more theoretical and mechanistic approach to setting interest rates than the non-academics, voting according to turnings of Threadneedle's computerised inflation forecast, which has consistently shown the risks on the upside. They have also been stressing the importance of establishing their anti-inflation credentials by sticking rigidly to the MPC's remit, which places achieving the 2.5 per cent inflation target above all other economic goals. The "real worlders", led by Mr George, have been much more concerned about the adverse impact of higher interest rates on output and jobs. In arguing for no change, he has been backed by DeAnne Julius, former chief economist at British Airways and the only committee member of with industry experience.

She is regarded as the most dovish member of the committee, believing that the shift to a service-based economy makes its potential for non-inflationary growth much harder to measure than in a goods-based world. Like her fellow countryman Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve, she is thought to favour testing the non-inflationary growth limits of the economy rather than basing policy on its historical performance. Julius is also thought to place heavy emphasis on the disinflationary impact of the Asian financial crisis. As well as Mrs Julius, Mr George has been able to rely on the support of his other deputy, David Clementi, who is in charge of financial stability, and Ian Plenderleith, the Bank's markets chief. Neither man has a track record in monetary policy.

This was described by Mr King as "undoubtedly disappointing" only a week ago in his speech to the building societies in Bournemouth. His comments will also have some resonance at the Treasury. The divergence between what is happening in the public sector, where pay is effectively capped by government spending limits, and what is happening elsewhere in the economy is also a source of potential social and political tension. The second area of technical concern is domestic demand. Here history weighs heavily in the Bank of England psyche: domestic demand has been partly blamed for the credit explosion after the 1987 Crash.

RATHER than risk a mistake now, the MPC appears determined to force domestic demand down even though the pace is already moderating. It fears that consumption may prove stubborn (despite some recent CBI data to the contrary) and that higher real disposable income, together with the rising wealth of households, could keep spending uncomfortably high. Hence the tightening. But what may seem technically correct does not necessarily produce the desired effect. One possible scenario is that the higher market rate will gradually feed through to mortgage rates, affecting the headline rate of inflation which will recycle itself in even higher wage bargains. That is almost certainly a consequence of the administrative price increases which pushed the headline rate to 4 per cent last month. Alternatively, there could be split on mortgage rates, with mutual societies leaving them unchanged while banks increase them — reducing the impact of the rate increase on consumption, already sheltered by the thousands of borrowers paying fixed interest rates — not to mention heavy discounting in the credit card sector.

Notebook

Pointyheads get rate rise wrong



Alex Brummer

ON technical grounds alone the Bank of England will no doubt find it relatively easy to justify its decision to raise base rates. What is most surprising is that more of the well rewarded economists which monitor the behaviour of the Monetary Policy Committee did not see it coming.

These private sector analysts — however strong their monetary credentials — are people of the real world. While there might temporarily be some inflation tendencies in the economy, they also know that the global economy is in a precarious state, and those central banks which matter most, the Federal Reserve and the Bundesbank, are holding back from tightening for precisely these reasons. The US economy and banking system has too much at stake in Asia, in much the same way as the German banks are involved there and in Russia. It has been plain from the various Inflation Reports, the MPC minutes and some of the public speeches of MPC members — most notably its most powerful member, deputy-governor Mervyn King — that the committee would prefer not to give too much weight to these factors. There was no point, for instance, in relying upon a strong pound to act as any more than a temporary barrier against inflation — since as soon as the euro area took shape the pound would start to fall. Indeed, as the Bank points out in its press release explaining the rise in rates by a

quarter of a point to 7.5 per cent, the exchange rate has remained 3 per cent below its central projection — buckling the exchange rate windbreak. **M**OREOVER, the MPC has generally been more concerned with what is going on in the UK than overseas. This is quite a "new Labour" sort of thing, Gordon Brown and his team are rightly interested in long-term stability and not making the mistakes of the past. That is why they are prepared to support the Bank of England tightening as the economy enters the more dangerous end-of-cycle period of growth. In the mind of the Treasury the MPC is keeping to the plot. The Chancellor warned in his March budget that one of

In these uncertain times it would be better if those who understand the markets best were in the ascendant.

the dangers on the horizon is the level or private sector wage increases — only for companies like Marks & Spencer to defy his warning with a package worth 5.7 per cent in wages and bonuses. Now the corporate sector has to take the punishment in the shape of higher interest rates, a firmer pound, tougher export markets to win and potentially higher unemployment. Certainly, the Bank has the statistical back-up to support its position. Overall unit labour costs are rising at 3.5 per cent, which does not seem unduly worrying. However, if the average earnings figures are broken down so as to show what is happening in the private sector, then one sees wages climbing at 5.6 per cent.



Sounds alarming... Canford Audio, whose exports will suffer as a result of the latest rise in interest rates

PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD RAYNER

Battered exporters

'They don't see impact in London'

Peter Hetherington

SURROUNDED by some of the highest export earnings in the North, Hugh Morgan Williams can only feel dismay at the prospect of higher interest rates further battering his electronics company in Washington New Town, Tyne and Wear.

From small beginnings more than 20 years ago, Canford Audio, which manufactures and distributes recording and broadcasting equipment, now boasts turn-

over approaching £18 million and profits this year should be well above the £500,000 achieved in 1997. But the high pound is already hitting exports and the latest rate rise will add to the misery. Mr Morgan Williams, a former broadcaster who chairs the Northern CBI, warned that higher rates "are not only hampering exporters, but also damaging the prospects of regional regeneration."

Something that would cost £150 in Britain will be sold for £30 less on the Continent. You can't keep that up forever." Pointing out of his window to the giant Nissan car plant just over a mile away, he says: "Talk to people like Nissan and they will tell you that if they had to make a decision on a third model at the plant today rather than a year ago, they would not build it in Britain."

Canford relies on exports for only a third of its output, but overseas contracts are becoming increasingly difficult to win. Mr Morgan Williams said: "In the EU we are not able to sell at an economic price. Something that would cost £150 in Britain will be sold for £30 less on the Continent. You can't keep that up forever."

Booming services

Rate rise will have 'negligible' effect

Chris Barrie

FLYING back yesterday morning from yet another business trip to San Francisco, Mark Fowle said: "We cannot recruit people fast enough to sustain the growth rate of our business. We are on course to triple our revenues this year on last, as we did the year before that."

Mr Fowle, and the wage pressure caused by companies like his, is one of the reasons the Bank of England raised rates yesterday. As chief executive of Xplora, one of Britain's most successful Net firms, Fowle talks of skills shortages as the only serious brake on development. But what of interest rates? "Negligible," he says. The potential combination of stock options and high salaries means the Bank of England's latest rise will pass unnoticed by staff in the Thames Valley corridor, which is noted for its concentration of hi-tech firms.

Higher housing costs in pipeline

Ian Wylie

BITAIN'S 10 million borrowers know that the pain of another mortgage rate rise is inevitable, even though mortgage lenders were too surprised by yesterday's announcement to respond immediately. The country's largest lender, the Halifax, said it believed there was "no need to take heat out of the economy" and that it did not intend to raise its mortgage rate before

also said it was waiting to see how the market reacted. If the full 0.25 per cent rise is passed on to borrowers and average mortgage rates rise from 8.7 per cent to 8.95 per cent, the monthly payment on a typical £80,000 repayment mortgage would increase by £9.66. Borrowers with interest-only mortgages would have to find an extra £11.66. The Halifax said a rise in mortgage rates would do little to help the housing market, which it claims remains "relatively weak". Earlier this

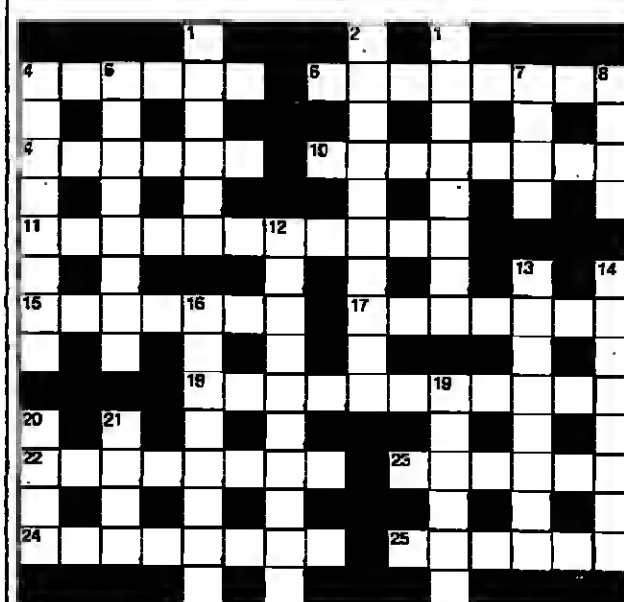
week it published figures suggesting that house prices in May rose by just 0.2 per cent. A further dilemma for home-buyers is guessing whether or not interest rates have now peaked. Some economists yesterday suggested that there may be no further rise in the pipeline but the prevailing view is that rates are more likely to be topping out. Popular fixed-rate mortgages could lose their appeal. Mortgage adviser London & Country says the next base rate movement is likely to be

the weekend. Other lenders say the pressure to move rates up will be irresistible. The Nationwide, which refused to increase mortgages after the last base-rate rise, is expected to be one of the first to act this time, although a spokesman said yesterday that it would not be the first. Officials said: "If we do raise mortgage rates, then we will ensure that interest rates for savers also go up."

Northern Rock, another lender which has been quick to respond to previous rises,

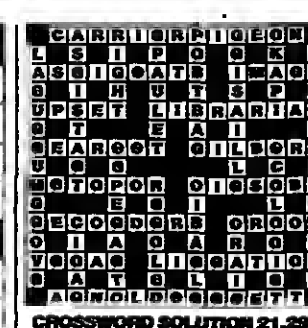
Guardian Crossword No 21,293

Set by Araucaria



- Across**
- 4 See 15
 - 6 See 15
 - 9 See 25
 - 10 Complaint of a scene of mutiny — put team first (8)
 - 11 PC professor? (11)
 - 15, 4ac., 6, 18 Some benefit for solvers (solvers imagine) could get a young fool (youth wasted) to fold decay (1,5,2,4,3,5,4,3,4)
 - 17 Find some of you near the door? (7)
 - 18 See 15
 - 22 Container on river makes one curse (8)
 - 23 Britain needs a king to contain its leader (6)
 - 24 Time for sleuth to return Scouts' transport (4,4)
 - 25, 9 Funny thing to go wrong in

- a philosopher, one seeking a quest (6,6)
- Down**
- 1 One who won't have a standard? (6)
 - 2 To achieve one's purchase is also right for a cartoonist (10)
 - 3 Looking out from the shield to insult the English (8)
 - 4 A cover to make from Melton (8)
 - 5 Fightin' against clots and rats? (8)
 - 7, 9 2,5,10 etc stones on plate take one from the millennium (4,4)
 - 12 At half 11 people try to keep one easy (10)
 - 13 It's awful rot to work in string — the object is the colour (8)
 - 14 Intelligence about the fearful hound mystery (3-3-2)



CROSSWORD SOLUTION 21,292

- 16 Sounds like a dead-beat going through the barrage (4,4)
- 19 Top nation? The idea is to divide uranium from deuterium (8)
- 20 The others are unemployed (4)
- 21 Boy said to be girl passed on (4)
- Solution tomorrow**
- 22 Stuck? Then call our solutions line on 0800 1 222 222. Calls cost 50p per minute at all times. Service supplied by ATS



Scots

SNP delight over independence

Played labels

سكنا من الامم